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PORTRAIT OF GILLES DE RAIZ

From *Monuments de la Monarchie francaise* by Montfaucon.

# C. Alias Bluebeard

## The Life and Death of Gilles de Raiz by Emile Gabory - English Version by Alvah C Bessie

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# Foreword

Gilles de Raiz, Marshal of France, convicted of having killed more than two hundred children, was condemned to be both hung and burned alive. That was quite a good deal; it seems, however, that similar to the criminals of ancient mythology, he was consecrated to undergo diverse metamorphoses. That is too much.

Writers of legends have made *Bluebeard* of him, the man who had six wives: *Anne, ma soeur Anne, ne vois-tu rien venir?* As for the accredited historians, if they have not always concurred in the same error, they have, to the contrary, embellished his true character. They have seen in Gilles de Raiz a sort of paladin, devoted, at least during his youth, to the most worthy causes, a brilliant mind passionately vowed to research in the greatest scientific problems of the day.

Finally, an eminent savant and member of the *Institut*, undertook to make an innocent man wrongly condemned of him, and thus carry off — which would have been particularly disagreeable to him — the merit of his sublime repentance and his edifying finish.

Our goal is simple: we will endeavor to abolish the effects of this posthumous condemnation to successive metamorphoses. We would like to restore, thanks to manuscripts and articles of value, the true physiognomy of the man who was martyred upon the meadows of Nantes. It will not appear any the less strange. Quite to the contrary, the true story is a hundred times more moving than the legend.

The life of Gilles de Raiz was that of a great criminal, who became a criminal because his youth was subjected to the worst of example and advice; his death was that of a doomed man because, in this stormy soul, consecrated to the mysteries of the diabolic sciences and abandoned to the cult of Sodom, there still

kept vigil, as an undying lamp, the immense faith of the Middle Ages. To deliberately ignore the profound mysticism in which, despite everything, his tortured and corrupt thoughts were steeped, is to fail completely to grasp the complex psychology of Gilles de Raiz.

As cruel, as perverted, as vain as Nero, whom he resembles in the large by his extravagant taste for distributing gratuitous feasts and spectacles to the public, he knew how to die with considerable humility; he did not, upon the threshold of the beyond, pronounce the presumptuous: *What an artist dies with me!*

Not as great, but truer and more human than Faust, hero of dream and the impossible, to whom he may be compared as an alchemist, Gilles de Raiz, a Faust in flesh and blood, personifies an entire epoch, through his passions, his vices and the ardor of his beliefs. His restless mind and spiritual torment make him of all time.

For centuries, upon the anniversary of his martyrdom, mothers of our Breton country-

side whipped their children to remind them of the fall and the assumption of Gilles de Raiz. This book, in which we have resumed all that is known to have been proven about his life and death, has no other object.

Émile Cabory

# PART ONE

## I. A Curious Education

THE traveller going from Angers to Nantes by railroad, before reaching the département of Loire-Inférieure, perceives on his right the imposing ruins of an old fortress: Chantocé. A high tower remains, disemboweled by a mine; at its foot lies a stagnant, greenish pond. About these ruins, harassed by time and political upheavals, and from this dormant water, there rises an air of infinite anguish and dolorous charm.

At the beginning of the 15th century, the castle in all the splendor of its power and youth, lifted the eleven silhouettes of its massive turrets. The ramparts were knit to the sinuous boulders upon which they were built. Stretching towards the north for the distance of a league, the pond, which emptied into the Loire, afforded a supreme defence. Watch-towers and loopholes overlooked the moat and

scrutinized the traveller. The rhythmic creaking sound of a water-wheel rose to the towers. The Loire flowed nearby, and the sails of 'the merchants of the Loire,' coming down to Nantes or ascending towards Tours were visible, white against the background of the meadows. Mariners dropped anchor at the toll-gate and paid a heavy fee to the lords of Chantocé.

On the upstream side of the hamlet, which consisted of a single street formed by the narrowing of the road to Nantes, a drawbridge could be seen, based on four strong pillars, and defended by two towers. Not far from there lay the buildings of an alms-house which embraced both a church and a cemetery. The lords of Chantocé had established it in the old days, as befits rich men and Christians, to succor the poor, the sick and the pilgrim. The titular head was required to furnish its inmates with a bed, straw and the wood required for their laundry.[1]

[1] A reference to the primitive laundering methods (*buanderie*) which are still in usage in some parts of

On the 4th of February, in 1404, the drawbridge was lowered to make way for the high and mighty lord Guy II de Laval, baron de Raiz, knight, lord de Blaison and Chevillé and great-nephew of Du Guesclin.[2] He had come to marry the only daughter of the lord of the district, Marie de Craon. Brother Jean du Bellay, abbé de Saint-Florent, was eager to bestow the nuptial benediction upon these two scions of illustrious family.

During the last days of the same year, Chantocé was once more *en fête,* for Jean de Craon held his godson and grandson over the baptismal font of the chapel — Gilles, born in ' a room in the tower called the Black Tower,' as the *Enquête sur la Dilapidation* tells us. A lackey named Marcé Garsenheu ' rang the baptismal bell.' There were many gifts: the abbé

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provincial France; laundry was taken to the river, and after being rinsed, was rolled and pounded against great flat boards.

[2] One of France's greatest warriors, who fought chiefly in the service of Charles V (1320–1380). (Translator's notes.)

of Saint-Georges-sur-Loire brought a young tame rabbit. The child received the surname Gilles, because, it is believed, the young couple had promised Saint Gilles that if he granted them a son, they would give him his name. The custom was common at the time, and multitudes of pilgrims desirous of an heir hastened to Saint-Gilles-de-Cotentin.

The history of Gilles de Raiz is quite disconcerting. The moment one wishes to treat of him seriously, one crashes against a veritable wall of mistakes and fabrications. Whether it be a question of his birth or his death, authors more eager to write than to engage in research, have employed all the fertility of their imaginations to scramble the facts. Behind Gilles de Raiz there trail legendary clouds more opaque than the artificial fogs laid down in war-time by seamen and aviators, to side-track the enemy.

The majority have ascribed his birthplace to Bretagne because, of all the titles the heritage of his ancestors permitted him, he chose that

of a forsaken land to the south of Comté-Nantais — the flat regions of the country of Raiz. Others have seen in him a native of Poitou because of his castle of Tiffauges, built on the banks of the Sèvre. One of them has written, referring to the green rolling land of Gâtine, in the Deux-Sèvres: 'The sombre visage of Bluebeard (Bluebeard?) is innate in the genius of this country. The roughness of the territory shields him from oblivion, and he remains the hero of the old legends that are still told to children.' [3] But Gilles de Raiz was neither Breton nor Poitevin; he was an Angevin, having been born at Chantocé in Anjou; the blood of Anjou and the blood of Mans flowed in equal parts in his veins.

His first years are little known. We only know that to the age of two or three, a wet-nurse brought from Tiffauges in Poitou, named Guillemette la Drapière, gave him the breast and lavished her cares upon him. When Gilles had grown up, Marcé Garsenheu went every

[3] Jean Yole, *Le Poitou, dans la France nouvelle.*

day ' to search the villages for milk to make his porridge.' Guillemette la Drapière had a son who was brought up at the Ecclesiastical School, and became the chaplain of his mighty foster-brother.

Upon the head of this fortunate child an enormous accumulation of inheritances was destined to descend. From the Lavals, the head of the house of Raiz, he received all the land which, after having been the barony of Raiz, and under Charles IX passed to the Gondis and to the Maréchal de Raiz and to the famous cardinal, whose grand-nephew Cardinal Paul de Retz was to know, like Gilles, the castle of the dukes of Nantes as prison; and, after having become the indefectible estate of Charette, during the Revolution, is today simply the land of Retz. From the Lavals again, he had perquisites in three provinces; in Anjou: Chemillé and la Fontaine-Milon; in Maine: Ambrières and Saint-Aubin-Fosse-Louvain; and in Poitou: La Mothe-Achard. . . . From the house of Craon the young couple would one

day inherit Louroux-Bottereau, Bénate, in Comté-Nantais, Chantocé and Ingrandes, all in Anjou.

Towards 1414, a brother was born to Gilles. He received the name of René, after the patron of Anjou, and the title of lord de la Suze. Of the childhood of Gilles, a happy childhood, nothing has come down to us. But the winds were soon to change, as generally happens, and the evil years which followed are better known to us, for that which Destiny writes in black ink remains; gold letters are effaced.

First of all, a great misfortune overtook the two children; the greatest of all misfortunes: they lost their mother. Marie de Craon was interred in the plot where, for two centuries her ancestors had been buried — in the abbey of Buzay, on the Basse-Loire. Some months later the disaster was complete — Guy de Laval joined his spouse beneath the same stone. His will, dated the 28th of September, 1415, stipulates that the care and education of his

sons be confided to his cousin by marriage, Jean Tournemine de la Hunaudaye, and that the two teachers he had assigned them be retained. But then the grandfather, Jean de Craon, intervened. If his appearance is unknown to us, we are not ignorant of his character. He was a man who was aware of the dignity of his name. The will humiliated him to the innermost fibres of his proud and stern being. He knew it to be contrary to the Breton custom — he attacked it, and pre-empted the tutelage of the two orphans; he won the legal battle. His pride was satisfied, but no worse calamity could have befallen his grandsons. Guy de Laval had probably foreseen it when he drafted a will so wounding to his father. The latter was not, as has been contended, a dotard; he was sixty years old, and though of weak character, he had a violent disposition. The pitiful results of the abandonment of children during trying times and war have been frequently affirmed. Their fathers in battle, the little ones wander about and from their con-

tact in roving bands acquire pernicious habits. In this case, the father was dead, but the tutelage of the grandfather was so lax as to be almost negligible. He displayed more ardor in reclaiming it than he did in putting it into practice. And war goes on: the depredations of highwaymen, murders and pillage take place over and over every day, and the war-orphans have nothing to follow but examples of cruelty and depravity.

If, as has been verified, heredity transmits traits from the father to the daughter, and thence to her son, and if we know nothing of the mother of Gilles de Raiz, it is easy for us, since we know his grandfather, to determine the taints that the child must have carried upon birth. The lord de Craon appears to us a brutal man, obstinate in his aims, and violent in their execution, an egoist and a miser, though not lacking in some great qualities. His mind was very agile, his courtesy has been lauded, and he was charged with important missions.

Unhappily, what is most striking in this

character, is a total lack of scruples. He was to be the most deplorable of models for the two orphans, and the most malign counsellor. The day he walked to his execution, Gilles explained the abandon in which he had been plunged, by attesting to an existence to which everything had promised happiness, but which had swerved in the most tragic manner.

Jean de Craon lived part of the year in Nantes, in his sumptuous *hôtel de la Suze*, now disappeared, but originally at the site of the hash of buildings which spreads between the Place Doumoustier and the Rue de Strasbourg, not far from the cathedral. The rest of the time he lived in Chantocé, or on one of his other immense estates. Soon, whether the tutelage which he had laid claim to and obtained weighed heavy on his shoulders, or whether his avarice sought still further to extend his rich inheritances to the profit of his people, scarcely had Gilles attained the age of thirteen than he planned to contract a profitable marriage for him.

The artificial clouds which have gathered about the birth of Gilles, hang just as heavily about his betrothals. The majority of writers, desolate because they are unable to attribute to him the six wives murdered by Bluebeard, say: If he did not kill his wives, he did at least visit evil upon two of his three fiancées — they died after some weeks of betrothal. The reality is entirely different, which is doubtless quite unfortunate for the picturesque in history.

On the 14th of January 1417, Jean de Craon betrothed Gilles to Jeanne Peynel, daughter of Foulques, lord de Hambuie and de Briquebec. Her father was dead, and the child, aged four, was one of the wealthiest heiresses in Normandy. Her tutor, the lord de la Roche-Guyon, had reserved her for his own son, then seven years old. Discord and rivalry! The child's grandfather, the baron de Chateaubriant, was poor; Jean de Craon promised to acquit him of his debts if he would consent to the marriage — a scandalous bar-

gain; but the Parliament intervened and forbade the marriage of Jeanne before her majority. That was the end of that mercenary engagement. Jeanne entered a convent; she survived her fiancé.

Jean de Craon went from Normandy to Brittany. There he saw another heiress, Béatrix de Rohan, daughter of Alain de Porhoët and niece of duke Jean V. The contract was signed on the 28th of November 1418.[4] But at the very moment of the wedding-celebration, Gilles, or rather Jean de Craon, changed his mind. It was no longer in Brittany that his desires found focus; there was something better in Poitou. A young orphan, named Catharine de Thouars, lived there, and she was infinitely richer. She was the daughter of Milet de Thouars and Béatrix de Montjean; a magnificent legacy was to fall to her: the barony of Tiffauges, situate at the juncture of Poitou, Anjou and Brittany; Pouzauges, planted at the summit of the heights which cut Bas-Poitou

[4] Bibl. de Nantes, fonds Bizeul, no. 1687.

in half; Confolens and other rich lands of great revenue.

Gilles abandoned Béatrix, and to be surer of getting Catharine de Thouars, he organized an expedition. Armed to the teeth, the grandfather and the grandson carried off the young girl while her father was at war in Champagne. On the 30th of November 1420, in the secrecy of a private chapel outside the limits of their parish, a hired monk blessed the union of the two young people. Here was an even livelier scandal, for Gilles and Catharine were related to the fourth degree — today we should say the eighth — but even so, such an alliance was forbidden by the church.[5] The bishop threatened, Gilles didn't give a damn, and in the shadow of the eleven towers of Chantocé they spent a tranquil honeymoon. However, Catharine believed she was going to become a mother and Gilles was anxious; he feared that the child would be born illegitimate, so he solicited a pardon of Pope Martin V.

[5] Bibl. de Nantes, fonds Bizeul, no. 1687.

There is absolution for all transgression. On the 24th of April 1422, the legate of the Holy-See wrote to Hardouin de Bueil, bishop of Angers, urging him to effect the separation of the incestuous couple and inflict a righteous punishment upon them; then, with that accomplished, to absolve them of their sin. The matter was promptly effected and on June 26th of that year, Gilles solemnly married, this time publicly, the cousin whom he had abducted, in the Church of Saint-Maurille-de Chalonnes. The Bishop of Angers pronounced the nuptial benediction in the presence of a great host of noble lords and vassals. Among the former were Jean de la Noue, lord of Vigneu in the diocese of Nantes; Jean Chevalier, Jean Gourdon, squire of the diocese of Luçon, and various legal dignitaries.

Jean de Craon had achieved his ends; his grandson would no longer be a stumbling-block to his ambition. Still, he did not propose to allow any other will to supersede his own failing determination, and he took over the

guidance of the young household. He was to give additional evidence of this brutal audacity, and the contempt for convention which he had displayed in the rape of Catharine. But what a preachment and example for the young man!

Catharine's father, Milet de Thouars, had died at the siege of Meaux the year after Gilles' wedding. His widow, Béatrix de Montjean, prompted by a most natural feeling, came to seek solace for her bereavement at the side of the younger woman. Jean de Croan took offence at this natural solicitude — he decided to send Béatrix away. Just as he had schemed to marry off his grandson, just so did he scheme to marry off the mother-in-law. At his instigation Gilles promised to cede to Béatrix de Montjean, should she take another husband, 'the castles and estates of Tiffauges and Beaurepaire, and a yearly pension of a hundred pounds.' Trustingly, Béatrix accepted; she married an officer of her late husband's entourage, who was her junior — Jacques

Meschin, lord de la Roche-Ayrault and de la Batardière.

Scarcely had the marriage been celebrated than our two scalawags hastened to annul its conditions. But these conditions had been signed — they were embodied in a written act, witnessed by a notary; therefore, it was not enough to say 'They no longer exist,' for such to be really the case. We shall see. Jean de Craon enlisted in his evil designs a certain lord de la Noë, Captain of the castle of Tiffauges which Gilles had ceded to his mother-in-law as an inducement for her to remarry. De la Noë, who coveted his master's sister, the demoiselle Meschin, for his own son Gerard, took it upon himself to answer for the success of their joint enterprise.

One day when the lady of la Roche-Ayrault was riding from Tiffauges to la Roche-sur-Yon, to rejoin her husband, she was 'seized and tied upon her horse,' together with her sister. The kidnappers dragged them by night to Loroux-Bottereau, a little town in Comté

Nantais, not far from the Loire, and thence to Chantocé. Shut in a dark recess, steeped in humiliation and terrorized, she was threatened with being sewn in a sack and thrown into the river, if she would not consent to renounce her marriage-dowry. She refused to give in.

However, Jacques Meschin came back to Tiffauges. His wife and sister were no longer there. He learned of the assault and sent his cousin Gilles Meschin to Chantocé to recover the two captives. But Gilles de Raiz had given his orders: the ambassador and his escort were immediately thrown into the darkest of dungeons, where they were deprived of nourishment and subjected to such cruelties that several of them died.[6]

What could the wretched husband do? After days and weeks of vain waiting and sterile protestations, he finally recovered possession

[6] Arch. Nat., $X^{1a}$ 9 197, fol. 216 to 22 and L9 198 fol. 160–161. Cited by A. Bourdeaut, *Chantocé et Gilles de Raiz.*

of his wife, and *that* upon the intervention of of his mother-in-law, who had become — what a mess! — the second wife of Jean de Craon! The latter had actually, one month after the death of his first wife, married Anne de Sillé, widow of Jean de Montjean and grandmother of Catharine de Thouars, the wife of Gilles de Raiz. He had married the grandmother of his grandson, which is not too common!

However, if it was not too painful for Gilles de Raiz to release his mother-in-law, he did refuse to allow her goods to accompany her — he declared that he would keep Tiffauges and Beaurepaire. Meschin brought his claims before the Parliament. As most frequently happens in the courts of justice, the matter dragged on over a long period of time, only to end without a satisfactory conclusion. As for Captain de la Noë, he received the reward due his offices; his son Gerard married the young girl who had been abducted.

But the king had demanded an investiga-

tion. He sent messire Adam de Cambrai, president of the Parliament of Poitiers, into Bas-Poitou. Gilles de Raiz and his grandfather had not counted upon being questioned, and their pride suffered a poignant injury; besides, they knew what such an inquiry might cost them. No, the investigation must not materialize. They posted themselves on the route taken by this dignitary, they attacked his escort and they beat and bound the ambassador himself: a further aggravation of their case. The king had the two accomplices sentenced to pay a heavy fine for the crime of having 'discomfited' a president of the Parliament. Naturally, they never paid it.

Such was the third characteristic adventure in which the grandfather and his grandson combined their vindictive passion. What can one expect of a young man who, at the age of sixteen abducted his fiancée, at eighteen arrested, confined and plundered his mother-in-law, and trussed up an envoy of the king? Authors who have spoken of him and lauded

his brilliant youth have — regrettable omission — neglected these abnormal antecedents. How can one understand Gilles de Raiz, if he is not placed in his true light? How can one grasp the force of the unique excuse he conjured up at the hour of expiation, if one does not immediately make known the counsels and examples which bore upon his young will and opened the path of evil to him?

Did he receive other than these strange teachings from his grandfather? What was his intellectual education? Was he an exception for his time, a sort of forerunner, a golden lamp alight in the depths of that sombre and mysterious cathedral known to us as the Middle Ages? Ancient historians who have praised the qualities of his mind, such as Argentré and du Paz, did not know him at all; they wrote long after his death. Monstrelet, who was of his time and related his crimes and his martyrdom, is silent on this point.

This convenient method of judging the mentality and culture of Gilles de Raiz is entirely

modern; is it therefore more precise? 'This diabolist who, in the 15th century,' Huysmans has said, 'was the most artistic and exquisite, and the cruellest and most rascally of men. . . .' Artist he was; but the extent of his erudition remains to be proven; all that has been said on the subject rests on inconsistent supposition. It is true that he possessed a rich library, which included a Suetonius in Latin, a Valerius Maximus, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Saint Augustine's *City of God* in Latin and in French.[7] But it has never been conclusively proven by those who have affirmed it, that he kept these works for any other reason than their rarity and fine bindings, and the prestige he acquired as collector and dilettante.

Furthermore, this celebrated library was not the fruit of his own efforts; the lords of Chantocé, Craon, Ingrandes, de la Suze, and his paternal and maternal ancestors had in a great measure been bringing it together since the

[7] Léopold Delisle; Inv. gén. et méth. des ms. franç de la B.N. II, 170.

middle of the 13th century. A certain viscomte de Thouars, ancestor of his wife, was even conspicuous for an attack he made upon an abbey, solely for the purpose of forcing it to sell him a missal of prodigious beauty. It has been said that the price was so high, as to later cover the cost of constructing the entire edifice of a new monastery, consecrated to the absolution of that evil deed!

If it were necessary to enumerate all the distinguished people of this epoch who were educated, really educated, the list would be quite long. Who, for example, does not know that at an early age Charles VII displayed a pronounced taste for letters, and for history in particular — and that he was a good Latinist? He supported Henri Mullein, the painter; he lived surrounded by chroniclers, surgeons, physicians and astrologers. Music also held a high place at his court. Again, who does not know that Marguerite of Scotland, wife of the dauphin who was to be the future Louis XI, cultivated poetry and spent entire nights com-

posing rondeaux? Alan Chartier was her mentor. Finally, who does not know that the duke de Berry, uncle of Charles VII, was also possessed of a high culture? He had assembled at his castle de Mehun-sur-Yèvre, a rare library, that he used! Its inventory has come down to us.[8]

It seems impossible to compare the young Gilles de Raiz to them, for nothing positively indicates that he was, in the absolute sense of the word, a very cultivated man. He knew how to sign his name, and even write; of that alone have we absolute proof. It has been believed that he knew the art of illumination; the words in his trial-record: *conscribebat in causto*, badly translated by the copyist, were the cause of this mistake that nearly all historians have reproduced. These words simply signify, 'he wrote in ink.' Twelve of his signatures exist in the *Archives de la Loire-Inférieure;* there were two others in the collection of Benjamin Fillon,

[8] Léopold Delisle, Inventaire du Cabinet des ms. de la B.N. I, 51, 53.

signatures which evidently escaped by some mysterious manner, from the same departmental archives; one of them is still in the Musée Dobrée in Nantes; the other has disappeared.

It is known that the young Gilles de Raiz had two preceptors, and he may be considered to have been as well educated as the majority of young lords of his time. His mind seems to have been more brilliant than profound. It is certain that he liked music and the theatre; we will see him maintain a costly collegiate in his chapel of Tiffauges; he was to give extravagant theatrical performances. But in all that, he was guided more by an incredible need of ostentation than by a desire to propagate the taste for belles-lettres and the arts. As for his passion for alchemy, it did not have a very lofty motive, and it would be presumptuous to include Gilles' mercenary experiments with the researches of the great alchemists whose names history has handed down to us — propagators of a science in its cradle.

Complicated from its earliest years, the physiognomy of this nobleman book-collector and highwayman will seem still more contradictory as the story is unfolded. He was a Catholic and a diabolist, a brave warrior on the field of battle, and a coward who trembled at the most fanciful tales! One can easily understand how this physiognomy has muddled opinion and side-tracked analysis! With a wild, passionate and voluptuous disposition, erected in scorn of the wills and rights of others, he possessed a soul which was still sensitive and obedient to the suggestions of pride and vanity, both sceptical and orthodox, and which remained most naïve despite its unsounded depravity. Such natures are the makers of great criminals, and sometimes of great saints. Gilles was to live as the former, and die as the latter.

He lived with his wife, usually at Machecoul and sometimes at Prinçay, in the country of Raiz. In 1429, probably, a daughter was born to him, whom he named Marie. He entrusted her to the zealous care of a wet-nurse, the wife

of a wine-grower named Guillaume de Couldreau. He was immensely rich, and he knew that he would be even wealthier some day; he knew he would be one of the richest nobles in the kingdom. He spent recklessly. He was opulent, generous, magnificent and hail-fellow-well-met. About him there lived a court of flatterers and parasites who shared his pleasures and gorged at his expense: Michel and Gilles de Sillé, two cousins of the second wife of Jean de Craon; Guillaume Guériff, one of the Craons; Petit-Jehan, saddler of Chateauneuf-sur-Sarthe; Roger de Briqueville, his cousin, a native of Cotentin; Hiquet de Brémont, Nicolas Muret, a clerk of Anjou; Poitou and others. They were all spongers, genial souses and gay blades.

However, his income dwindled rapidly, and his grandfather began to take notice. Gilles was only twenty years old, and he was not to come into possession of his capital until he had attained his majority, which at that time was fixed at twenty-five. It was high time to inter-

vene: even then his income was melting rapidly; soon, unless care were to be exercised, the estates themselves would slide down the same steep slopes. The young man had profited by the example of Jean de Craon; he had neither scruples nor control, and all attempts to restrain him, even those of his grandfather, were unbearable to him. Open war was declared between these two creatures who were so similar in the violence of their character and their frenzied desire to augment their wealth. But while the old man coveted it for its sheer possession, as a miser, and also to enhance the dignity and authority of his name and rank, the young man loved it as a prodigal — for the satisfaction of his pride or the passion-quenching opportunities it offered. He rebelled, he snarled, and Jean de Craon had cause to repent the advice and the corrupt example he had given: the whelp had become a wolf.

## II. Companion of Jeanne d'Arc

THE whelp had become a wolf, but he commenced to howl at the English, which in the eyes of posterity was to be his principal claim to fame. Besides, all was not evil in this stormy soul; Gilles was a thoroughbred — he had a feeling for military affairs. In the great fight in which France and her enemy had been engaged for nearly a hundred years, he instinctively followed family tradition — he declared himself on the French side — he even was, with the Rohans, practically the sole noble Breton — in reality so little a Breton — who was a partisan in the national cause. And that fact will not be deemed worthless eulogy if one considers the frightful confusion that reigned in men's minds. Who was the real king of France? Who was to come out victor, the English king or the French king?

Where was duty due? Duty was not necessarily compatible with immediate interest, and Jean de Craon was to become aware of that. On the 14th of June 1423, by letters dated from Paris, Henry VI of England gave 'to his loved and loyal knight, Jean de Montgomery,' the lands, castles and fortresses of Ambrières and Saint-Aubin-Fosse-Louvain in le Maine, which had been confiscated from Jean de Craon and his grandson, who were guilty of having embraced the cause of Charles VII.[1]

A magnificent career was open to Gilles if he desired it. Jean de Craon could count on an appeal to that heredity which spoke in his impetuous soul, to drag him from his costly debauches. He himself was all-powerful in Anjou at the time, and that as much for his personal qualities as out of consideration for his imposing fortune in land. He owned lands practically everywhere, in Anjou as well as Brittany, and if his grandson was not the

[1] Arch. Nat., JJ. 172, fol. 134. No. 265. See further Bibl. Nat. ms. de Camps, 49, Charles VI, fol. 38 et seq.

hero of the Bluebeard-story, he himself might well have been the marquis de Carabas in *Petit Poucet*.[2] The dukes of Anjou and Brittany both sought his advice on prickly questions which might lead to conflict.

Conflict? It was not the time for provinces to wrangle among each other; the English tide was rising higher and higher, and its first waves were already breaking across the frontiers of le Maine. Yolande d'Aragon, who reigned over Anjou, trembled for her States; she sought the advice of Jean de Craon; she charged him to defend them, and in 1427 she named him their governor.

The grandson benefited by the promotion of his grandfather to a position of power. He commanded several companies in the territories of Mans and Anjou, and bravely laid siege to the foreigner. It was guerrilla warfare, rather than open combat — there were ambuscades, ruses and traps. In the same locali-

[2] Hop O' My Thumb.

ties, four hundred years later, the Chouans[3] were to employ identical tactics.

Ambroise de Loré, a gentleman of the vicinity who commanded a company of Scots, seems to have been the real head of this spirited insurrection; Gilles was more his lieutenant than his equal. Together they attacked and stormed several castles: Ramefort in la Mayenne, Saint-Laurent-des-Mortiers and Lude, in la Sarthe. It is said that Gilles was the first to scale the walls of this last fortress — with his own hand he killed the English captain, Blackburn, and he himself was then appointed captain.

Such are the true exploits of which he was hero — but fictitious exploits have been added to them, as often happens in the case of people who have become legendary figures. He has been made to take up the career of arms at the age of fifteen. At the same age, he is supposed to have rescued Jean V, whom the Penthièvres

[3] A name given to Royalist insurrectionists in the Vendée. (Translator's notes.)

held prisoner at Champtoceaux; then he is supposed to have figured with Richemont at Saint-James-de-Beuvron. All of this was manufactured of whole cloth. He never fought for the sake of Brittany — his troops were not natives of the country of Raiz. He was and he intended to remain an Angevin leader in the service of France.

Be that as it may, his valor cannot be denied; it was to find its reward, and a boundless reward, due to the active, powerful and selfish protection of his cousin, Georges de la Trémoille, the notorious minister of Charles VII. La Trémoille's activities are well known. Involved in all the intrigues which were woven about the Dauphin, and about the Dauphin when he became king, he stopped at nothing which could strengthen and maintain his own position. He had the sire de Giac, in whom he saw a rival, seized and thrown into the river; he married his widow. He professed an unconcealed hatred for the high-constable de Richemont, whose influence operated in the same

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political zones. He had triumphed over all, and he ruled the king without interference.

It was at this time that a young shepherdess from her native Lorraine, came to Bourges and presented herself before Charles: 'Gentle Dauphin, I am called Jehanne the Maid; the God of Heaven apprises you through me that you will be consecrated and proclaimed in the town of Reims, and that you will be the lieutenant of the God of Heaven who is the king of France.' The king, incredulous as St. Thomas, after having tested the girl who claimed to be charged with a divine mission, was finally convinced and gave her command of the armies.

But what perfidy and jealousy rankled in the breasts of those chiefs, now demoted to subordinate rank! They followed the young girl, but they were overflowing with rancor and the one who, more than any other, felt the prick of this unavowable feeling of envy was Georges de la Trémoille. Would the modest shepherdess, radiant in her divine calling, be the cause of a decline in the power of the minister? Al-

though he professed to be sceptical on the subject of Jeanne's mission, he was eager to take precautionary measures. How was one to know if the general rumors and the clamor already rising about her, would not eventually tarnish his own glory?

He did not propose to impede the performance of this mission in the slightest; could he have? He wished merely to have it controlled. He sent La Fayette away, and he summoned his young cousin Gilles de Raiz and his troup of Angevins and men of Mans; and he entrusted Jeanne to his care. Gilles was to watch over her and at the same time obey her, and he held him responsible before the king for the young girl. Let us record in passing, this strange fact: Jeanne d'Arc — the indirect cause of the great military success of the future Marshal. Without her, might he not have remained a simple company-leader, skirmishing in the God-forsaken villages of Anjou and le Maine?

At her side he took part in the famous campaign of deliverance; he fought courageously,

as he had always fought. It was he who succored Jeanne when she was wounded at the battle of Tournelles, before Orléans, and he entered the long-besieged city at the head of his Angevin horde. Then came the thundering victories of Jargeau, Beaugency, Meung and Patay, where Talbot was taken prisoner. They were sweeping victories — a boundless enthusiasm swayed the armies. Gilles lived in the heroine's dazzling radiance, and he profited by her glory — his name rang out in the clamor of the triumphs borne home by the extraordinary peasant.

The prophecy Jeanne had made before the king was about to be fulfilled: 'The God of Heaven apprises you through me, that you will be consecrated and proclaimed in the town of Reims.' Gilles brought back to Charles VII the girl whom it was his duty to protect. Boundless was the satisfaction of the king who had been derisively called the King of Bourges: his kingdom was expanding visibly. The king of England would no longer be the king of France!

Charles VII was favorably inclined to every generosity. How could he fail to reward her to whom he owed so great and unhoped for a victory? But Jeanne asked for nothing, wished nothing, and her mission was not yet ended. Then rewards began to pour down upon those who, at her side and with her aid, had helped to oust the enemy: Gilles first of all. The king bestowed on him the high honor of going to Reims for the Holy Vessel for the coronation, and then reporting back with it to the abbey of Saint-Rémi.

Gilles left, followed by his faithful retinue. He arrived at the old church in Reims, and the precious Vessel, dating back to Clovis, was entrusted to the king's messenger. It had been enshrined since the 12th century in the belly of a golden dove, which stood on a gilded silver charger that was richly chased and set with the rarest of stones. The feet and beak of the bird were of coral.

The day of the coronation, Gilles naturally occupied a prominent position, at the side of

Jeanne d'Arc. And the next day, as a further manifestation of his gratitude, the king made him a Marshal of France. Finally, some days later, by letters dated at Sully-sur-Loire — of which, be it noted, La Trémoille was master — he authorized him to embellish his escutcheon with ' an orle of fleur-de-lis on a field azure.' Very proud of this rare distinction, Gilles thereafter decorated his crest — gold with a cross of sable — with the lilies of France.

Meanwhile, the campaign of liberation swept onward. Jeanne wanted to march to Paris, but the king's timid counsellors insisted on her conquering towns of secondary importance: Laon, Soissons, Coulommiers, Provins, Chateau-Thierry and Beauvais. It was a real triumphal march. In every village liberated by the young girl, Gilles enjoyed a portion of the homage she received — which the entire army received. His soul was exultant. He was young, and had already reached the pinnacle of fame; his comrades were celebrated leaders: La Hire, Xaintrailles and, as the historian Monstrelet

reports, ' Many other captains of the advance-guard.' He was always in the foreground in fact, since he even preceded the Maid who directed manœuvres and inspired the soldiers.

The prodigious, stirring epic reached its climax. The Parisians, too involved to surrender, had had time to organize a defence, and the army attacked in vain. Jeanne, wounded again, was obliged to abandon the capital, and hastened to seek refuge in the hotly besieged chateau of Compiègne. It is well known how, attempting to escape the same day, fighting in the rear-guard and carried away by her impetuosity, she found the draw-bridge raised on her return, and surrendered to the Bastard of Vendôme. That worthy sold his prisoner to the duke of Burgundy who, in his turn, yielded her to the English — human merchandise bought and then unloaded for a better price. The word treason has fluttered over this dolorous drama, as a streaming banner — Jeanne must have been betrayed. Betrayed by whom? By Gilles

de Raiz, who was charged with her safe-keeping? It has been rumored. Gilles must have been privy to a plot concocted at the very court of the king, at the instigation of La Trémoille, a plot which had for its aim the surrender of Jeanne to the English. What must one believe?

Jealousy ran rampant about Jeanne: in the bitter thoughts of her companions-in-arms, in the soul of the king himself, who was always weak and vacillating, and above all in that of the shady La Trémoille. It was in the air that the young girl breathed, and in the aureole in which she moved. In spite of that, nothing sanctions the belief that this jealousy was manifested in an active and criminal fashion. But that which happened is enough to cast the shadow of doubt upon the loyalty of her escort and the fidelity of Gilles, since Jeanne alone fell into the hands of the enemy.

As for the king, alas! he hurriedly forgot the girl to whom he owed his throne; Charles VII was not possessed of great nobility of character, nor was anyone about him. Did anyone ever

think that an effort should be made to deliver the noble captive from the tower in Rouen? None of her old comrades, surely, neither Gilles, nor La Hire, nor Xaintrailles; and the frightful tragedy was carried to its climax.

That which was remarkable, and which all historians of that terrible and magnificent period have pointed out, was the transformation wrought in the hearts of men by Jeanne d'Arc. Jeanne appeared, and all these old-timers, these captains confirmed in their vices by years of a merciless war, were transformed instantaneously. They no longer swore or blasphemed, or plundered — they no longer fleeced people or massacred inoffensive countrymen. It was indeed a strange miracle.

With Jeanne dead, the spell was broken: old dormant passions reawakened, hatred, lust and evil-appetite sprouted from their perennial roots. Across regenerated France there passed once more the breath of despair. Not one of these companions who had been sanctified by the liberatrix escaped a just punishment for

having abandoned her to capture, imprisonment and death.

The morality of all these celebrated leaders, having for one brief moment been exalted, resumed its normal level, and that level was most singularly low. The best of them was not worth much. Was it not La Hire — or was it Talbot, of the other side — who contended that if God were to become a man of arms, he would be a plunderer? The famous *Grande Ordonnance* of 1439, which its editor, Isembert, called one of the most important edicts of the Monarchy, was expressly enacted to permit armed resistance to the oppression of warriors and mighty barons.

Jean de Craon did not escape the pestilence, aged as he was; he was in the grip of the tyrannical habits of his entire life. At that time there was a powerful society which had existed from time immemorial, called the *League of Merchants and Mariners of the River Loire*. Since it refused to submit to extortionate toll-rates, Jean grew angry. The merchants filed a claim

against him, insisting that they were actually trimmed and exploited. Jean combated them in a drastic manner; he tried to force them to abandon their suit. The king, who was the last court of appeal of subjects harassed by their feudal lords, declared that he would take the merchants of the Loire under protection. The lord de Craon did not have to be told twice.[4] However, he was not at all cured of his frantic love of money; he was even to give an inconceivable proof of it. This time it would not be poor mariners and petty merchants he intended to attack — it was to be his sovereign herself — Yolande d'Aragon.

Of Yolande, history has preserved a flattering memory. Daughter of Jean, king of Aragon, and of Yolande de Bar, she had been betrothed at the age of thirteen, to Louis II, count of Anjou, but the wedding had not taken place till nine years later. According to the testimony of Juvénal des Ursins, she was indeed 'one of

[4] Mantellier, Hist. de la Commonauté des marchands fréquentant la rivière de Loire, III, 273.

the loveliest creatures one might ever see.' She was at the same time a cultivated, witty woman, courageous and high-spirited. Her influence extended beyond the boundaries of her duchy, to the very court of France. It has been said that she was practically a mother to the royal child who was to be Charles VII — she gave him her daughter Marie to wife. Once a widow, she ruled her duchy with wisdom and determination and was loved and respected by all her subjects. It was this exceptional woman, to whom he owed the honors with which he had been showered, that Jean de Craon was to attack, or rather to attack through hired partisans.

One day, Yolande started for Brittany; she rode in gala attire, with few bodyguards. What was there for her to fear in her own States, or on those of the duke of Brittany? She progressed peacefully, but when she reached Ancenis, the garrison of Chantocé, despatched by order of Jean de Craon, fell upon her, plundered her of her luggage and her horses and then, with the

assault accomplished, returned to Chantocé. It was a vulgar and profitable act of banditry. Did Gilles take part in this expedition, as he formerly did, beside his grandfather; was he an accomplice? No one knows. But he could not have been ignorant of the affair, and this new example of inconceivable violence on the part of his grandfather, was not calculated to keep him in the path of virtue.[5]

In 1432, about one year after the death of the Saint, we find him at Lagny, where he behaved so well that, later, after his death, in an act relating to his succession, the king was to cite Orléans and Lagny as the two glorious poles of the military career of the late Marshal. But that was the end; he too — electrified for a moment — relapsed into his former practices. He left the court and returned to le Maine, where a struggle was taking place which was no longer a national war, but a veritable civil war:

[5] Arch. Nat., P. 1334[5] — fol. 34. Already cited by M. A. Bourdeaut. As a result of this unbelievable act of brigandage, Chantocé was seized.

the political rivalry of La Trémoille and Richemont had developed into a bloody battle. Gilles had once been served by a brave captain named Jean de Beuil — now they were foes, for Jean de Beuil supported Richemont while Gilles supported his protector, La Trémoille.

There was desperate battle about Sablé, which Richemont was occupying in the name of Yolande d'Aragon. What made this struggle peculiarly typical, was the relationship between Jean de Beuil and Gilles de Raiz. The former was the son-in-law of Jean de Craon, since he was the son-in-law of Gilles' grandmother by marriage.

In his old age, Jean de Beuil wrote a work entitled *Le Jouvencel,* in which, under various real or fictitious names, he portrayed himself, his companions-in-arms and his adversaries.[6] No document could possibly shed more light on the life of Gilles de Raiz at that time. Jean de Beuil narrated with sufficient fidelity, the

[6] *Le Jouvencel,* par Jean de Beuil, published by Leon Lecéstre, 2 vols. Paris 1887.

pillage, brigandage and battles in which Gilles had taken part, and he is depicted in the most unflattering manner. Taking into consideration all forced exaggeration, since the brush was wielded by an adversary, it must still be admitted that the portrait must bear some resemblance to the original. Gilles appears therein in all the brutality and callousness that were his before the coming of Jeanne d'Arc. He was vindictive, he ravaged and terrorized; he seized Jean de Beuil, his former friend, and shut him up in a dark prison, as he had formerly done to his mother-in-law.[7]

One more occasion offered, however, for Gilles to escape this scarcely honorable life: the king called him to arms. It was a question of going into Burgundy to succor the duke de Bourbon, champion of the French cause. Gilles

[7] Once free, Jean de Beuil thought of nothing but vengeance; he figured among the accomplices — Pierre de Brézé, Coëtivy, etc., who came one night in June 1443, captured La Trémoille and locked him up in his turn, which stripped the favorite of his prestige thenceforth — the beginning of his disgrace.

had no money. He addressed himself to George de la Trémoille, saying: 'I need 12,000 gold *réals* to prepare this campaign — lend them to me.' La Trémoille took a mortgage on Chantocé and advanced the sum. With the cash once in his purse, Gilles was in no hurry to make his appearance in Burgundy. His boon companions, Sillé, Nicolas Muret and Poitou, prevailed on him to stay, and he stayed with them. Other reasons for this veritable refusal of obedience in the face of the enemy have been broached: it has been said that La Trémoille, who had also left the court, was the first to dissuade him from leaving. Again, it has been said that his captains, feeling it a small honor to serve under his command, deserted. There is absolutely no need to search for any other reason: he was simply caught once more in the grip of his tyrannical associations, seized once more by his passion for luxury and ostentation.

In September 1434 we find him in Orléans, where he was preparing a series of lavish celebrations. He had completely forgotten his mis-

sion, and it was his brother René who took it upon himself to leave in his place, in order to preserve the honor of his name.

Completely overcome by a justifiable irritation, the king sent for the culprit and overwhelmed him with humiliation. He allowed him to keep his Marshal's baton, but his confidence was dead and his affection rooted out. Gilles, Marshal of France in name only, was no longer to be honored with a position of confidence; the king repeatedly declared him unworthy of administrative office.[8]

Jeanne's influence had for a single moment only ennobled the man who had been charged with her safe-keeping. However, it has been further affirmed that his contact with Jeanne must have given the future alchemist and devoté of the Black Mass a taste of the Supernatural. Can this be taken for granted? The heroine's entourage did not at all believe in the

[8] Arch. L–I., E 175, 2nd plea of René de Raiz. Cf. A. Bourdeaut, *Chantocé et Gilles de Raiz*, 79 — Gilles' disgrace dates from 1435.

divinity of her mission — why should Gilles, more than his companions, have seized upon what superhuman element there was in the part played by the shepherdess of Dorémy? Then again, and above all, is it possible to conceive that the supernatural and the divine could lead to a passion for the satanic mysteries?

## III. Spendthrift

THE span of Jean de Craon's life was drawing to a close. Sombre presentiments beseiged him. In the seclusion of the castle of Tiffauges, which he scarcely left thereafter, each day he learned of some new extravagance or further act of violence committed by his grandson. He wondered what would become of the fortune which the young prodigal had already so nearly consumed. Then he knew the weight of his responsibility. Gripped by fear in the face of eternity, he recalled all his errors and injustices and he tried to make honorable amends. He sought to make reparation for the evil he had committed. Alas! face to face with Gilles, he felt himself powerless. Gilles had sold his patrimonial house at Blaison when he reached his majority — that is to say, at the age of twenty-five. The old man had worked himself into a fine frenzy, and warned

him of the certain consequences of this life of dissipation.

He felt more at ease, however, before the serfs he had molested. He lightened the taxes of his peasants; he lightened the taxation of the 'sailors of the Loire,' who had been overburdened so long. He decided that his obsequies would be as simple as possible; his weapons and his charger would not participate.

As for his grandchildren, if he left the entire heritage it was incumbent upon him to leave them, he well knew which of the two was destined to do more honor to the race and to the name; he bequeathed his sword and cuirass to René, the younger, and not to Gilles, his elder. These arrangements settled, he sat down humbly and with anxiety, to await the great day of his death. It came on the 15th of November 1432. Simply, as he had desired, Jean de Craon went to his last sleep in the church of the Cordeliers[1] d'Angers.[2]

[1] An order of Franciscan friars. (Translator's note.)

[2] M. André Joubert published his testament in the Revue Hist. et Arch. du Maine XXVIII, 340.

The reproaches and admonitions of his elder seem not to have had any influence on the Marshal: on the contrary, it is certain that with Jean de Craon in his tomb, Gilles' prodigalities redoubled, his eccentricities, as we would say today, became exaggerated and his crimes found their inception.

He intoxicated himself with vainglory and delusions of grandeur. When he entered town on his favorite horse, 'Nutcracker,' he drank, so to speak, the acclamation of the populace. Naturally generous and open-hearted — a generosity in which the need of ostentation took a great part — he watched the numbers of his adulators grow, unsuspicious of ulterior motives. His gratuities, even in the name of the most deserving causes, soon passed all bounds. At the time of his struggle in Bas-Maine, for example, he maintained at great expense a veritable army of spies. He surrounded himself with a bodyguard of two hundred splendidly equipped cavaliers, all recruited from the upper strata of society. Was

the poet Alan Chartier a member of this brilliant escort? Each cavalier had his personal entourage, and Gilles paid for everything, and footed all the bills. What prince in those miserable times could have imitated him? Certainly not the ex-king of Bourges. He behaved as certain scions of wealthy families behave today, who, masters of their destiny, dissipate within a few years a fortune which it took several generations to amass. All this was as nothing compared to the theatrical performances he was to give in Orléans.

Was it not enough to intoxicate an impressionable, vain and feeble mind, to be, at the age of twenty-five, rich and liberal enough to scatter unheard of sums of money in a few months, and share the delights of one's own sensations with an entire populace? Just as they applauded the handsome warrior caracoling at the head of his troops, so they glorified the magnanimous lord who gave the public the most amazing performances, of which incredi-

ble reports have been handed down to us by witnesses.

Gilles de Raiz was certainly not the only exalted personage to offer this type of choice entertainment to his contemporaries. Many other lords sought public favor in the same manner. Some years later, in 1456, René d'Anjou was to be seen expending considerable sums on the *Mystère de la Résurrection*. In 1493, in this very town, a cousin of Gilles', one Guy, count de Laval, was to give several very elaborate performances of the *Mystère de Sainte-Barbe*, and employ a hundred actors.

But naturally, Gilles attempted to outdo his predecessors and his possible successors, and certainly made a better showing than his contemporaries. Each performance of a *sotie*, a farce or a mystery, cost him fabulous sums. One particular work was notably a source of enthusiastic popular acclaim and ruinous expense to him: the *Mystère du Siège d'Orléans*.[8]

[8] Published in 1862, after a MS in the Vatican, by Guessard & de Certain, in the Coll. des docum. inédits.

How could one fail to understand the triumphal success of a composition which was destined to commemorate the memorable happenings which are depicted in it, in the very town in which they took place? It was probably played for the first time on the anniversary day of the delivery of Orléans, and nothing was overlooked to ensure its success, in either the pomp of the settings or the number of the actors. There were more than one hundred and forty actors and more than five hundred supernumeraries; there were costumes cut from luxurious materials which were never used for more than one performance; there were draperies of cloth-of-gold or silver, silks and resplendent velvets which, in imitation of the Queen of Sheba, had been imported from distant lands. All of this was thrown into the discard the next day, knocked down at a preposterously low figure and declared unworthy of reappearance on this sumptuous stage.

The theatre itself was a marvel of construc-

tion and management. Conceive of a scaffolding of five or six stories, both as high as a modern house and as broad as the greatest stage extant. On each floor an act was depicted. The spectator assisted in these multiple and simultaneous actions, his eye ceaselessly enraptured and captivated, his attention constantly and breathlessly held despite the length of a drama which lasted an entire day!

Crowd followed upon crowd; they came running from distant countries; lord, bishop, priest, bourgeois and peasant came to see and hear the work written to the greater glory of Orléans and Gilles de Raiz. As a matter of actual fact, the companion of the Maid played an important rôle in the *Mystére d'Orléans;* he played the part of a great leader and generals followed in his wake. On various occasions he spoke, assuring Jeanne of his devotion and the loyalty of his troops:

*Aussi, moy, dame, ne douptez;*
*Faire vueil ce qui vous plaira;*

*Mes aliez et depputez,*
*Dame, sachez tout y vendra*
*Et vostre voloir on fera*
*Du tout en tout à vostre guise*
*Et quand vouldrez on partira*
*En faisant à vostre devise.*

What a bellyfull of pride it was to Gilles, to hear his mighty deeds thus celebrated! Despite everything, can one understand how, in order that his immense audience might not trickle away, he pushed the folly so far as to gorge them out of his own pockets? During the entire period of these exhibitions, the town of Orléans was converted into one vast banquet; everywhere there were tables in the open air, in the streets and in the public squares. Hypocras and hydromel flowed in torrents from precious drinking urns; the most sought-after venison, the best of viands and the most succulent of fish furnished out the colossal orgy, which was recommenced each day! The *Mémoire des Héritiers* says that in the town of Orléans,

'there was great scarcity of viands.' Could it have been otherwise when Gilles monopolized everything to feed his guests? He lived there with his brother René, surrounded by a glittering court, from August 1434 to September 1435.

All the town's hotels were occupied by them: Gilles reserved the *Croix d'Or* for himself. His cronies lodged at the *Tête Noir,* at the *Écu de Saint-Georges,* at the *Enseigne de l'Épée,* at the *Cheval Blanc,* the *Grand Saumon,* the *Petit Saumon,* at the *Homme Sauvage,* the *Dieu d'Amour.* . . . René had the *Hotel de la Roche-Boulet* entirely to himself. But where could the multitude who came running to the resounding spectacle be boarded? Only the private houses and the spacious floors of the *Hotel de la Belle-Étoile* remained to them.

Gilles adored this feverish and deafening existence, in which the acclamation of the ecstatic populace reverberated — a populace to which he offered the ancient *panem et circenses* — no, to which he offered more than the vulgar circus: an intellectual, historic, palpitating

performance; more than the bread — which was accompanied by no other viands — but copious and refined repasts. He surpassed all the famous Lucullii, all the celebrated Emperors, donors of largesse and distributors of manna. He was Marshal of France and popular Maecenas — nothing now was lacking to his fame.

Yet he wanted more; he wanted his reputation in musical matters to equal his reputation for the literary. By nature he loved religious music — music which warms the soul, creates wings for it and transports it to inaccessible realms. An exalted mysticism is close relative to sensuality. Of a special, superstitious piety, Gilles de Raiz at the same time felt the need of absolution for his sins, or rather crimes. With this fact in mind, he founded his famous ecclesiastical collegiate.

His faith and his remorse had already given him several opportunities for pious liberalities. One, among others, merits recording. At the close of the 14th century, Catherine de Mache-

coul, a lady of Loroux-Bottereau and an ancestor of Gilles', had founded an alms-house in that city, and dedicated it to St. Lazarus; travellers, pilgrims and the sick found asylum there; women in labor rested there for long periods, 'watched over and cared for in their labor and their pains, gently fed and nourished.' One of the descendants of the good woman had nothing better to do than turn the endowment of the foundation to his own uses. Gilles took it upon himself to make reparation for the harm that had been done, and on the 26th of November 1432, he restored the hospice to its former prosperity.

From 1432 to 1435 Gilles, whom we shall see abandoned to the most frightful passions, underwent a sickly crisis of religiosity at the same time. The 15th of August 1434 he had himself received as canon of St. Hilaire-de-Poitiers; he was the first layman since the dukes of Aquitaine to have attained this dignity. He instituted two prebends in the same basilica, but he chose its titularies from men of his retinue who

were anything but honorable: André Buchet and Jean Rossignol.

But the foundation of his collegiate seems to have been his driving thought and paramount desideratum. By a paper dated at Orléans the 26th of March 1435, he established it, as he said, for the good, the welfare and the salvation of his soul. He consecrated an entire fortune to its maintenance: his barony of Raiz, his lands at Chantocé and Ingrandes, all his existent and incumbent inheritance. He left the said goods to the dukes of Anjou and Brittany, for the purpose of maintaining his collegiate; in their default, to the king of France; in his default, to the emperor; in his default, to the pope; in his default, to the Crusaders — that is to say, to the orders of Saint John and Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem. This mention of the Crusaders had been absent from acts of holy foundation for quite a period of years, but Gilles de Raiz, whose driving faith retained something of times past, could not forget those who, perhaps theoretically more than actually,

were then fighting for the liberation of the tomb of Christ.

The collegiate was invested with the same luxury and bizarre care for detail which was lavished upon theatrical productions; there was the same chaos and exaggeration. In the 14th century, in Brittany, cathedral-musicians lived in confraternity. They supported themselves by the wages they drew from participation in religious ceremonies, living modestly in the annexes of the holy place. A chapter ruled over them, and a master of psalmody, and a master of plain-chant.

In Gilles' eyes, so simple an organization was unworthy of his great fortune and his ranking in the state. He honored the highest dignitary of this assembly, messire de Ferrière, with the title of bishop, while the others, the simple canons, also wore the episcopal costume. They bore mitres on their heads and the *cappa magna* on their shoulders, and with so fine an air withal, that, in the words of the *Mémoire des Héritiers,* 'this reunion resembled a synod

of bishops rather than a reunion of canons.' According to a witness who was called in the *Enquête sur la dilapidation,* there were in the house, ' about eighty people, eating and drinking, comprising the chaplains and singers of the chapel.'

Another witness told how, when he was in a town through which Gilles de Raiz was passing, he hurried to put in an appearance at his house, ' to hear the singing and to see the said chapel; and eat and drink at the house with the companions.' He added that Gilles de Raiz, ' kept a better house and went to greater expense than the King, and that there was a greater noise and greater entertainment at the house of the late sire de Raiz, than at the castles of the Kingdom of France.' Altogether, at Machecoul or at Tiffauges, as formerly at Orléans, there was perpetual banqueting and a table free to all, to cronies, singers, servants, travellers, adventurers or any who might ask. At the ceremonies, the luxury, colors and diversity of robes were conspicuous; the surplices were

trimmed with the rarest of furs or bordered with the finest embroidery. The variety of dalmatics, chasubles and stoles was dazzling: for an apostle's *fête* there were vestments of cloth-of-gold; for a martyr's, vestments of vermilion silk; for the confessors, there were vestments of green silk and for the virgins, vestments of white satin. The chiselling and enamelling of the holy vessels, crucifixes, ciboria, censers and patenas were magnificent. The most precious gems burned with their richest fire. Even to the immense candelabra of massive gold, everything indicated a splendor which no church in France could rival. The reliquaries of the saints, especially, were remarkable as much for their delicate and elegant forms, as for the purity of their rich metals, and when this astounding chapel moved in the wake of its master's travels, the glory of the great robes, the beauty of the horses — of which each canon possessed his own — and the hand-worked decoration of the coffers, was an awe-inspiring sight for the gaping populace.

The melodious choirs of this most unique choirmaster were especially worth hearing, and Gilles spared neither money nor trouble for its maintenance. If he heard that at some distant place, a child or a man lived whose voice qualified him for membership in this union of hand-picked singers, he immediately despatched a courier. Thus he had a young man named Rossignol (or it might have been his nickname), brought from La Rochelle; he had heard him sing and he remained enchanted ever after. He gave him lands at La Rivière, in the neighborhood of Machecoul, he named him treasurer of his collegiate and overwhelmed him with innumerable favors.

The perfected organs which accompanied these angelic choirs were also to be marvelled at. Gilles possessed several of them; some were stationary and others, of a smaller size, intended to follow him on his tours, were carried upon the shoulders of six husky servants. From one side, they looked like the spires of a cathedral, from the other, like buttresses, and the

spire and buttress were connected by a double row of pipes in the form of a semicircle. The pipes were attached to the body of the organ, which also served as a base for the keyboard and the bellows.

It was marvellous to hear an office executed by this itinerant consistory. On various occasions, the duke of Brittany requested the honor and the joy of listening to it, and he even sought to have it in his service. The most ethereal chants and the mellowest religious concerts were offered to its audiences, and Gilles admired the results of his own munificence; a tremendous popularity cradled him, as on a sonorous wave.

At this time music was much in favor, and its study took a leading place in the curricula of universities. Although already in its decline, the Gregorian chant still unfolded the magnificence of its antiphony, its hymns and its prosody, beneath the high cathedral arches. Gilles de Raiz' choirs certainly gave auditions of the

pieces then in vogue in the churches: the *Inviolata,* which dates from the 10th century, the *Ave Verum,* of the 11th, and the admirable *Stabat Mater.* They certainly executed the famous mass of Guillaume de Machaut, who lived in the preceding century and was the first to compose a work for so much as four mixed voices. This mass delivers itself of such an intensity of emotion and such grandeur that it has received the name of the Mass of the Sacrament.

Artistic and sensitive as he was, even while intoxicating himself with the satisfaction he drew from his audiences, Gilles could not have helped but be penetrated by the intense lyricism scattered through these religious chants, and above all, the psalms, which St. Basil has said to be the work of angels. His soul, with its vacillating remorse, murmured with the voices: *Asperges me, Domine, hysoppo et mundabor; lavabis me et super nivem dealbabor.* 'Purge me, oh Lord, with hyssop, and I shall

be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.'

Psalmody is the 'singing medicine' of the soul, Gregory of Nazianza had written, and Gilles often felt a great need for moral healing. However, stronger than this languor and more violent than his desire to please God, it was his vanity to please man that was strongest. Soon the choir furnished nothing of piety but its external form; the need to appear, to be seen and heard, soon became the dominating idea of those who composed it. 'It was,' says the *Mémoire des Héritiers,* 'only vainglory, and a matter for derision among men of sense and discretion.' The pride of its master had quickly vitiated his work and contaminated its performers.

In the midst of this hosanna, and among the turbid golden clouds which enveloped him, Gilles did not perceive or fear the widening abyss beneath his feet. His fortune melted with the speed of frost under the first rays of the sun; the triple reason of his theatre, his colle-

giate and the stupefying facility with which he believed interested flattery, demolished, block by block, the entire edifice of his enormous fortune. Ruin stood before him with an implacable countenance. The *fête* of Orléans cost him more than 80,000 crowns in gold, which represents, in the money of today, an unbelievable number of millions.

The revenue on his lands was estimated at 30,000 *livres;* his salary as Marshal amounted to 25,000 *livres,* which were largely absorbed by his war-time expenditures; his furniture must have been worth 100,000 gold crowns. No prince of France was able to display more wealth. When we think that the brothers of the dukes of Brittany enjoyed only 6000 *livres* in tithes, we begin to realize what the fortune of Gilles de Raiz represented. Ah well, all this — lands, fortresses and tithes — flowed away as though they were so much water.

First of all, he behaved as all prodigals: he borrowed and mortgaged. We have seen him borrow from his friend and cousin La Tré-

moille, under the false pretext of war in Burgundy. He borrowed from his peers, then we see him borrow from his quarter-masters: grocers, bakers, tavern-keepers, butchers, fishmongers, fowlers, hotel-keepers, drapers and furriers. . . . He borrowed at Orléans, Angers, Nantes, everywhere he travelled. He pawned everything he had on hand; jewels, rings, the artistic treasures of his chapel, the literary treasures of his library, among which were two copies of the *City of God*, one in French and the other in Latin, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. He pawned the most marvellous coursers in his stables.

These amounts soon proved inadequate. His creditors became more and more exacting, and Gilles, caught in the machinery, gradually relinquished the furnishings of his castles, then the castles themselves with their surrounding lands. The early relinquishment of goods coïncides with his military campaigns. About 1430 he borrowed 1200 *réals* from Perivet Pain, a bourgeois of Angers. Four other loans swelled

the debt to 4680 *réals*. Strapped and menaced from every side, it seems that Gilles went mad. The monstrous proof of it is the power of attorney he accorded to his friend Roger de Briqueville, on the 28th of December 1434. One day, drunk or maddened in the face of a debt come due, Gilles, in the presence of Jehan Leprestre, notary of the Prévost of Orléans, signed an authentic act for his friend, by which he accorded such power to Roger that he could have ruined him, had he wished. Even worse, he went so far as to authorize him to negotiate for the marriage of Marie de Raiz, his daughter, 'with whomever it might be,' and to fix whatever dowry he might choose. Gilles had been at Orléans for four months when he drafted this unspeakable act. At the pinnacle of his renown, he was tormented by the fear of seeing his popularity crash through lack of funds.

Roger de Briqueville understood his master well: it was imperative that his goods and the castles of Pactôle be transmuted into gold at

any price — the river of gold must continue to flow freely. So the sales followed each other: the 22nd of March 1435, sale to the duke of Brittany of a rent of 200 *livres,* levied upon the *chatellanie* of Bourgneuf, for 5000 *livres.* The 3rd of July, sale of a rent of 300 *livres* levied on the same chatellanie, for ' 6000 old gold crowns.' These two rents were repurchasable for three years, pending the reïmbursement of the 10,000 *livres* paid by the duke. Shortly thereafter came the cession of another rent of 7000 *livres* on the same Bourgneuf and 300 *livres* on the castle, the lands and forest of Prinçay.

Gilles' family did not view the disappearance of all these inheritances from the past with equanimity, as they flowed into the open gulf between the prodigal's feet. If the population clapped its hands before him, his relatives, Anne de Laval, Guy XIV, count de Laval, Louis de Chatillion, André de Lohéac, his cousin, and even René de la Suze, his brother, who had even assisted him at the *fête* of Orléans, were all anxious. They thought of Gilles'

unfortunate wife, of his daughter, sacrificed by the Briqueville act; perhaps they also thought of themselves as heirs, in the event of the decease of the child.

They remonstrated severely with Gilles, then, faced with the futility of their remonstrances, they decided to employ drastic measures. Upon their request, the king, by an act given in his Great Council and dated the 2nd of July 1435, declared him a prodigal. Duly informed and convinced 'of the bad management' of the sire de Raiz, he forbade him to sell his lands. He enjoined the captains of his fortresses not to surrender them to anyone even if Gilles sold them. They were given orders to save them for him, despite Gilles himself, and no one was to be permitted to contract agreements with him. Finally, the Parliament of Poitiers was commissioned to appoint a trustee for him.

The royal letter of interdiction was published at the sound of a trumpet in Orléans, in Tours, in Angers, at Chantocé and at Pou-

zauges, in Poitou; in short, in all the places where Gilles possessed castles and lands, except in Brittany, and we shall soon see why. A curious thing — the interdiction had no consequences. Perhaps his family, presuming that the royal letter was adequate, did not require the Parliament to carry out the stipulations of the interdiction; perhaps this last was not able to find a trustee for so formidable a charge. Trustee of a Marshal of France, trustee of this dangerous lord who lived surrounded by a troup of mad soldiers, perpetrators of his evil deeds! What man would have cared to be his trustee? The royal edict remained ineffectual.

So Gilles, even while declaring that he would accept the terms, continued to borrow, sell and ruin himself. He knew quite well that no one would dare to lay a hand upon him. The pride he drew from his popularity and his military service was increased by that he now drew from his power in the land. What lord could equal him in wealth or territorial prowess? His van-

ity was such that we shall see him, he a Catholic, resist the Pope! He addressed a request to him, begging him to recognize his collegiate, and the Pope answered by a very precise and categorical refusal: 'Our Holy Father, duly warned and ascertained of the bad management of the late lord de Raiz,' the *Mémoire des Héritiers* reports, 'and realizing that all this came of madness and folly, refused to listen to him.' Gilles did not, however, cease to maintain this prime cause of expenditure, and it was to the sound of holy chant that he completed his destruction.

Tiffauges was his principal residence and the home-port of his vaunted collegiate — Tiffauges, situated at the confluence of the Crôme, a humble brooklet, and the Sèvre-Nantaise. A tower of marvellous beauty, an elegant example of the military architecture of the 16th century — thus *after* Gilles de Raiz — rises from the deep valley, to the summit of the hillock. What remains from his own time is, all told, little enough: some tottering ruins, held

up by the tangled roots of vines — vines, the natural vestment of dead stones. Vines and legends together, rise to the assault of the old walls. They say in the land: 'Tiffauges — Bluebeard's castle.'

This castle, built in the 12th century, formed an irregular trapezoid of about twenty meters on each side. At each of its four wings there rose a squat and formidable tower, which looked as though it had been telescoped upon itself. Between these four towers there was a little round tower, and a triple wall girdled the dungeon. Thus defended, it seemed to be impregnable. A writer of the 16th century has described it in these terms: 'The dungeon, which is a high, broad and strong sort of tower, studded with great cobbles (as all the rest of the castle), is surrounded by great moats, as deep as wells which are bolstered with masonry on both sides and filled with stagnant water and render this avenue impregnable and the dungeon inaccessible, even though all the rest of the castle were taken. Besides which, the

CHATEAU OF MACHECOUL, BRITTANY

three-fold door seems in itself strong enough to defy entrance.[4]

Still less remains of the chapel: some walls of the apse and the ogival arcade which separates it from the rest of the edifice. A strip of sky can be seen through this sombre arch. Beneath the chapel, which was constructed in the 13th century, a crypt of a still more archaic aspect was dug. A parsimonious light filters through five narrow windows. Those capitals of the chapel that time has spared give a certain impression of architectural sobriety. The dimensions of the apse, five meters wide by fourteen meters long, indicate approximately the rather spacious proportions of the monument.

It was there, in this place which must have been decorated with all imaginable luxury, that the collegiate's religious concerts were most

[4] Lancelot Voésin, sgr. de la Popelinière. La vraye et entière histoire des troubles et choses mémorables advenues tant en France qu'en Flandre et pays circonvoisins. *La Rochelle,* 1573, p. 173.

frequently to be heard. Just as for the shows given at Orléans, crowds came running from far places, drawn by the fame of this divine music. What an expense for Gilles, what a new source of financial worry! The care, the nourishment and the wardrobe of the members of the collegiate were no small item.

And the lands continued to be sold. If it were necessary to tally up the items, the list would be long and monotonous.[5] The *Mémoire des*

[5] Here we can give a rapid resumé: In Anjou: *chatellanie* of Fontaine-Mulon, sold for 4000 gold crowns to Jehan de Marsillé; the chatellanies of Blaison and de Chemelier, to Guillaume de la Jumelière, for 5000 gold crowns, of which Gilles received but 3000; the Gratecuisse lands to Hardouin de Bueil, bishop of Angers, for 1200 crowns; various fiefs on Chantocé and the pool of Brissac, to others; a rent of 150 *royals* in gold, to two merchants of Angers, for 1500 gold crowns. — In Brittany: the *chatellanie* of Saveray and 160 *livres* in rents on the forest of Brécilien (I & V) to Jean de Malestroit, bishop of Nantes; the lands of Bregny, etc., for 14,000 gold crowns; the beautiful house of la Suze, at Nantes and the rents attached to it, to the chapter of Notre-Dame; various rents and revenues to the chapter of St. Peter; the lordship of Loroux-Bottereau, to René de Raiz. — In Poitou: the lovely castle and

*Héritiers* raises the total to 180,000 or 200,000 crowns. If you add to this sum the dilapidated income and revenues of the Marshal, you will attain a fantastic total which would equal, in the money of the present day, not only the greatest French fortunes, but the fortune of an American billionaire!

These riches were not lost to everyone: when the shattered vessel comes to shore, the shipwrecked sailors quarrel over the cargo. Upon the unhappy Gilles de Raiz there rested the burden of all the unscrupulous loan-sharks, all the intermediaries who were more calculating than honest, all the confidence-men who played upon his naïveté and their master's

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lands of la Mothe-Achard, with 1200 *livres* in rent, to Guy de la Roche-Guyon; the lands of la Voulte and de Chenecé, to Jehan de Montecler and Guil. Le Cesne, for 6000 gold crowns; Le Breuil-Mangon-les-Poitiers, for 2600 gold crowns; various rents on the lands of Chesnes and de Longueville (Vendée) for 1800 *royals* in gold; the lordships of St. Étienne-de-Mer-Morte, de Tarvois, etc., to René de Raiz. — In le Maine: the lands of Ambrières and de Saint-Aubin, to two merchants of Angers. . . .

absolute lack of practical judgment. If he bought, he was robbed; if he sold, he was robbed; if he borrowed, he was robbed, for he borrowed at a usurious rate of interest. He never bargained, and no tradesman, be he draper, goldsmith, hotel-keeper, or other, was unaware of his unhealthy taste for grandeur, and his arrogant scorn for middle-class customs. They would have had to be of exemplary probity, not to have profited by it. Gilles paid everyone two, three or four times as much as the actual value of an article. He paid 14,000 crowns for three religious vestments of cloth-of-gold, although they were worth but 4000. He poured out any sum, so long as they would sell to him on credit. To buy on credit, that is to say, to pay the least possible for the moment — that was the way, he believed, to minimize or retard disaster. One day he bought, 'a little horse for a gold *marc* (eight ounces of gold); the said horse being worth no more than ten *réals,* which horse the said lord gave to one of his incontinent singers.'

He ceded the Breton salt-mines for one half their value, and the revenues from his rural fiefs slid down the same deep slope. He does not seem to have imagined that everything must have an end, and that that end was coming more rapidly than if it had been given wings. The bourgeois loaned to him at ten per cent and on mortgage, but instead of paying the agreed sum at once, they gave a part in merchandise: Arras tapestries, cloth-of-gold and Reims linen, and Gilles soon disposed of these costly goods for an absurd price.

His most intimate companions themselves pillaged him outrageously. Briqueville, his procurer, among others, saw to it that he was fatly taken care of by the buyers; he had both hands in the pie. Jacques Boucher, an inspector of Orléans, consented to considerable loans, but at rates of interest which were hardly amicable; Gilles de Sillé, Petit Jean and others of his following, helped him out on particularly difficult occasions: for example, one day when he no longer had even food or drink, and his

quarter-masters were particularly refractory. But these *in extremis* loans by obliging servitors were not given graciously, and the majority of his creditors held dummy contracts and general procurations in their hands — Gilles furnished every imaginable means for them to plunder him.

His brother, René de Raiz, played a double rôle in all of this; as he was ten years younger than his brother, he could not have had the slightest authority over him. If we judge him in a general way, he seems to have quite maintained a certain pride of name, a sense of decorum and morality. We could never bring any charge against his private life, were it not for certain acts of plunder, which were doubtless in resemblance of the majority of lords of the time. But if we judge him from the viewpoint of his relations with Gilles, he does not seem to be so absolutely irreproachable.

La Fontaine's *Dog*, seeing the other dogs throw themselves voraciously upon their master's meal, could no longer remain passive him-

self: he took his share of the kill. René de Raiz followed suit: he signed the request of interdiction with the other members of the family but he did not show himself to be one jot the less ardent to devour as much as he could hold of the banquet whose expenses were defrayed by his brother's fortune. He wished to have Gilles restrained, but he did not stop contracting advantageous bargains with him.

He was not the only one in the family to act in that manner. The lord de la Trémoille and others came in for the sumptuous free-lunch; each wanted some of it. But he who got the best helping — to every lord, his due — was incontestably the duke of Brittany himself.

## IV. The Duke of Brittany [1]

AT that time a duke ruled over Brittany who was neither ignorant of the value of money, nor the pains all princes were obligated to take to extend the boundaries of their territories: Jean V. If there ever was a much-discussed man, it was he, and he has been the subject of animated verbal duels. Was Jean V worthy of the name 'the Wise,' with which his contemporaries saddled him, or did he rather usurp that boastful appellation which has been faithfully transmitted through the ages? It all depends on your viewpoint. If you consider the individual himself, he seems overburdened with unpleasant faults, but if you consider him in the light of his subjects' well-being and the

[1] Bulletin de la Soc. d'Arch. de la L–I, 1913 et 1914; articles by MM. Durville & Bourdeaut.

splendor of his reign, you become aware of the fact that these same shortcomings spelled real prosperity for his duchy. In this respect he resembles our Louis XI.

Writers who have criticized him have said that he was a niggardly miser — he skimped and hoarded ceaselessly and was known to have refused to pay his sister's dowry, as he should have. Others have replied: he was as anxious over his subjects' prosperity as he was over his own wealth. Like Richelieu, he overthrew several powerful nobles and brought peace to his duchy.

At what a price! the critics cry — by perpetual concession! In allegiance he constantly and shamelessly vacillated between England and France. He alternately offered his duchy's homage to the rivals who were wrangling over our unhappy country — Charles VII of France and Charles VI of England. While he was still young, he did a rather shady thing — he arrived at the battle of Agincourt after it had been fought, whereas he might have changed

its outcome had he hastened ever so little. His lack of speed had doubtless been deliberate, and was not the result of any lack of courage, even though one of his comrades said: He has the heart of a lion . . . one year old. He was to completely unmask when he became angry with the national cause — he was to demolish the structure he had built, enroll in the *la Praguerie*[2] and then finally ally himself with England.

Granted, his defenders reply, but it must be admitted that from a purely Breton point of view, the county's independence would have been more seriously jeopardized by France than by England. His subjects never ceased to praise his administration.[3]

Perhaps — but he was merciless to his ene-

[2] A revolt directed against the reforms of Charles VII, in which the future Louis XI, then dauphin, took part. So called by analogy with the Hussite uprising in Prague, just as anything in the way of a criticism of the present order is now unthinkingly termed ' Bolshevism.' (Translator's note.)

[3] Cf. *Chronique du Religieux de St. Dénis* and *de Jean de St. Paul.*

mies. After the capitulation of Champtoceaux he received a hostage in the person of a boy of sixteen named Guillaume de Blois; he dragged him from prison to prison for twenty-eight years. Old Olivier de Clisson, who had been tried before the Parliament of Paris for the crime of lèse-majesté, was dying in the castle of Josselin. Jean V announced that he was on his way to seize him. Clisson's daughters and son-in-law offered Jean 60,000 crowns to allow the dying man to draw his last breath in peace. Jean invoked his duty. They raised the sum to 80,000 *livres* — still Jean refused. He was promised 100,000 and he released his victim — he had only been holding out for his price.

He has been considered a great statesman. He was that, but chiefly because he had a great minister in his service: Jean de Malestroit, at first bishop of Saint-Brieuc, then bishop of Nantes and first president of the Chamber of Accounts. It has been affirmed that through years of living together, man and wife finally come to resemble each other, not only physi-

cally, but even mentally. It is difficult to know whether Jean de Malestroit, having been Jean V's chancellor and intimate for forty years, grew outwardly to resemble his master, but it is certain that his heart was an attenuated portrait of Jean V's, and the latter's political principles were those of Jean de Malestroit.

There was a teetering sort of diplomacy between France and England, to which country the bishop was frequently sent as ambassador, as well as to the duke of Burgundy and the king of Castille. Malestroit possessed the complete confidence and friendship of Charles VII, who called him his 'loved and loyal counsellor and second father'; his second father — that is to say, his god-father — his spiritual father.

Though Jean de Malestroit cherished the same ambitions for his beloved Brittany, he was none the less greedy for more than empty honor himself. His family's motto is typical: *Non male stridet domus quae numerat nummos* — which may be translated, The jingle of money in the counting-house is not entirely dis-

agreeable. Was he scrupulously honest in handling the public funds? We believe so, although the contrary has been affirmed.[4] He died poor, leaving as sole bequest to his heirs the trouble of selling his furniture to pay his debts. His way of life, and above all the numerous pious organizations he endowed, had completely ruined him.

Two of these foundations, established in the cathedral of Nantes, which he had planned and whose corner-stone he had laid, demonstrate, in a strange way, his anxiety for social equilibrium. One was instituted for the repose of the soul of Henry V of England, and the other for the repose of the soul of Charles VI of France. He was, in brief, a very astute statesman and a great bishop, who lived chastely and very piously despite his desire for wealth. He left a spotless reputation in Brittany, which

[4] Cf. La Martinière, *Jean de Malestroit*, p. 10. M. Thomas Lacroix has rightfully stated: 'The accusations brought to bear upon the origin of his fortune, rest on a document couched in ambiguous terms.' *Positions des thèses de l'École de Chartres*, 1925, Jean de Malestroit.

may not be said for all the members of his family.

Such was the character of the two prominent men who directed the destiny of Brittany during the period whose events we are relating. Naturally well-informed, both were not in the least ignorant of the resounding excesses of the unfortunate Gilles de Raiz, and the hopeless difficulties into which he had begun to sink. They were on the best of terms with him; the duke, even though the sire de Raiz was the intimate friend of La Trémoille, rival of Richemont, his own brother, appointed him lieutenant-general of the duchy — perhaps a flattering ruse. It was therefore easy for Jean V and his chancellor to negotiate with Gilles for the purchase of the estates and castles which he was scattering to the four winds. For his own use the bishop acquired the lands of Vue, Prigné and Saint-Michel-Sénéche on the Basse-Loire.

But the duke had other aims. He had already secured a certain number of mortgages on va-

rious of Gilles' fiefs, but they were only of secondary interest to him. What he really coveted, was the Marshal's birthplace — the superb estates of Chantocé and Ingrandes. He wanted Chantocé because it was an impregnable fortress in Anjou, just outside of his own territory, on the road to France. He wanted it because Chantocé was a powerful dungeon, flanked by eleven towers which rose against the horizon of the Loire. Chantocé had cast its spell upon him and it haunted him — he had to have it. Some years before, he had already acquired from the duke d'Alençon, the baronies of Fougères, Bazoges and Entrain, situated on the other boundary of the province. What a reïnforcement it would be to the territory's military protection, could he succeed in getting his hands on Chantocé, at the gates of the Comté-Nantais!

The struggle for Chantocé was to occupy several years in the lives of the duke and his chancellor. It was a comic and heroic political romance, which deserves to be told in some de-

tail, for it throws light upon the schemes of which Gilles was the plaything, as well as the incurable and presumptuous naïveté with which his soul was infected.

To secure Chantocé, the duke had to have a free hand. But, in 1435, it will be remembered, at the request of his family, Gilles had been proscribed by the king, with the proviso that the edict be made public in all the provinces in which the prodigal owned land. But if Jean V had obeyed the royal injunction, and made public the act of interdiction, it would have meant the end of his designs and hopes — it would have meant farewell to Chantocé! He decided to give no publicity to the vexing document, so while everywhere else, in Poitou, in Anjou and in le Maine, no one dared buy from the proscribed Marshal, Jean, relieved of competition, continued to tear his prey to pieces. He signed nine new contracts with the prodigal. Following his example, his treasurer, Geoffroy le Ferron participated in the feast. He had already bought les Jamonières and Bouin in

1435, and later on, in 1440, he bought the rich lands of Saint-Étienne-de-Mer-Morte.

But it still wasn't Chantocé. How could he take possession of Chantocé? The means he employed are of all time — of today as well as yesterday. He summoned two of Gilles' henchmen, and said: 'I will give you 400 *saluts* in gold, but you must convince your master that it would be to his interest to sell Chantocé and Ingrandes. If you do not succeed, you will have to return the money.'

The two henchmen sought their master, and this is the gist of what they said to him: 'Milord, his lordship the duke of Brittany proposes to buy Chantocé and Ingrandes from you for 100,000 *écus d'or*. Far from wishing to rob you of what you still possess, he is, to the contrary, quite content to return the possessions he already has, deducting their value from the sum he offers. He will relinquish the 53,000 *écus* profit he has made upon Bourgneuf, Prinçe, Bénate and other regions of the land of Raiz. Furthermore, he will repurchase for

you the isle of Bouin and les Jamonières which you sold to Geoffrey le Ferron. Finally, he will restore your estates of Raiz in their entirety, and will give you a six-year option on the repurchase of Chantocé.'

The temptation was strong, but still Gilles hesitated. The Raiz estates had been in the family for so short a time: an old woman named Jeanne Chabot had left them to Jean de Craon, on condition that his eldest daughter marry *her* relative, Guy de Laval. This recently acquired land would not have particularly interested Gilles, had he not taken its name. It was the name of this territory which he had glorified as Marshal of France; it was that name that the frenzied crowds of Orléans had acclaimed. He was the lord de Raiz. Could he actually be the lord de Raiz if he no longer possessed its lands?

Besides, they were by no means entirely valueless, and Gilles conjured up the thought of that vast barony which comprised so many highly praised lordships and estates. . . . Cer-

tainly the aspect of the countryside was far from beautiful; it was not Tiffauges and the luxuriant, rolling landscape of the Sèvre; it was not Chantocé and the panorama of the Loire valley. True, the region was dull, flat and almost treeless, but it was rich, productive and until a comparatively recent epoch had been immersed in the fecundating waters of the sea.

Gilles mentally counted over the fertile lands he would have to relinquish forever if he did not accept the offer: Prigné and its castle; the isle of Bouin, which the rising river-mud was gradually soldering to the mainland; Saint-Père-en-Raiz, where fishermen formerly put into port; Bourgneuf, an important center in the heart of vast swamps, and finally Machecoul, his beloved Machecoul, capital of the barony whose name he bore. Its fortress stood on the banks of a brook called Falleron, and its insurmountable ramparts extended over the monotonous fields. Though not as valuable as Chantocé, it might be mentioned among the

foremost Breton strongholds. Besides, it played an analogous part in Comté-Nantais, on the border of Poitou, to Chantocé in Anjou, on the frontier of that province — it was a sentinel. Gilles hesitated, but little by little he became reconciled to the disposal of his Angevin possessions.

The two conspirators played their trump-card: 'You surely have not forgotten, milord Marshal, that on July 3, 1435 you ceded to his lordship the duke of Brittany, an income on the land of Raiz, repurchasable for a period of three years. To recover and salvage those vast estates whose name you bear, you would have to find 3000 *écus* within the next few weeks.'

Furthermore, the duke himself showered the lord de Raiz with attention, flattered him with all sorts of pleasant epithets and soothed him with unctuous speeches; he assured him of 'his courtly grace,' he called him his 'loyal kinsman' and made a parade of his great love for him. How could Gilles have withstood such constant onslaught? He surrendered and gave

his consent: Chantocé, the fortress of Anjou, was to pass into the hands of the duke of Brittany. Jean V had achieved his heart's desire.

But at that very moment a startling climax took place. René de Raiz, who had received a certain number of fiefs on Chantocé from his brother, took fright: once in the hands of Jean V, Chantocé would never again revert to the house of Laval. He sought out René d'Anjou and warned him of the impending danger: the duke of Brittany entrenched in his own territory! René d'Anjou already had sufficient reason to intervene in any of Gilles' affairs; he held him accountable for his many acts of violence and plunder. He simply declared Chantocé seized and confiscated in his name.

Jean V became threatening, angry and vituperative, but he was too much a politician to press matters further — he professed to abandon his claims and, when requested, he swore on the body of Christ, during performance of mass, that he would buy neither Ingrandes nor Chantocé. René d'Anjou was reassured — but

he had reckoned without his neighbor. When he least expected it, Jean V called his brother Richemont to the rescue. Richemont commanded the lord de Rostrenon, his lieutenant, to seize Chantocé, and the commission was summarily carried out. The ermine-bedecked banner of the Breton dukes fluttered in the breeze over the Angevin fortress, but René de Raiz did not admit defeat; he secretly marched upon Chantocé, captured de Rostrenon, gave him a sound thrashing and triumphantly declared: 'The King forbade the purchase of my brother's possessions; I am enforcing the royal edict.'

It was only a brief triumph. Charles VII, having been thus dragged in, declared that after all, this much-disputed fortress might as well be his. It should have been the way to reconcile all parties, as the judge indicated in *L'Huitre et les Plaideurs*.[5] He found a pretext, and said: 'I shall keep Chantocé, since Gilles

[5] Corneille's famous skit, known by every French schoolboy. (Translator's note.)

failed to offer it to me as homage, on the death of his grandfather.'

René was furious, and refused to surrender the castle to the king's envoy, Louis de Beaumont. But how long could he have held out? Happily, Gilles himself intervened at that moment. Hard-pressed by the two hirelings of the duke, who were fluttering the fatal promissory-note under his nose, Gilles had no intention of being further duped. He said to René: 'Give me Chantocé, and in exchange for the fiefs you hold on that estate, I will give you the lordship of la Mothe-Achard.' René accepted, accounting the profitable exchange sounder than his precarious hold on the fortress. But the king? he objected — we'll have to handle him with kid gloves. Don't worry about it, Gilles replied — this is what we'll do: the recapture will take place in the name of the duke of Brittany, the purchaser of Chantocé. I will attack in his name — you will appear to yield under pressure, and the trick will be turned.

The Marshal successfully assailed the enor-

mous stronghold at the head of a company of only twenty men. His gesture was given further authenticity by the presence at his side of the chancellor, Jean de Malestroit. Once more, Brittany was ensconced in Chantocé, the Angevin estate.

The awkward transaction seemed to have been accomplished. Not a bit of it! René had first received 4000 *écus,* then letters of pardon for the bad treatment with which he had so amply regaled Richemont's lieutenant. Then his brother declared: 'My friend, you got off easily, so I'll keep la Mothe-Achard, which I promised to give over to you.' René protested, so Gilles, to further prove that he'd be better off if he kept quiet, proceeded to strip him of the other estates which he had previously surrendered to him — Saint-Étienne-de-Mer-Morte, and Loroux-Bottereau. From then on there ensued contention and legal battles which terminated in 1439, in a clumsy compromise.

What lies behind all this treachery, plunder and Indian-giving? The proof of the fact that

the unhappy Gilles, faithful to his unfortunate training, was the prey of every appetite, and the proof that the precepts of deceit and brutality which his grandfather, Jean de Craon had inculcated in him from his earliest youth, had not been wasted on him. The seed had fallen into fertile soil.

In everyone's estimation Gilles was finished, worn out and done for. Having achieved his ends, by becoming the master of Ingrandes and Chantocé, Jean V now treated him as a negligible quantity. With his archers mounted on the turrets of the Angevin fortresses, what reason had he further to manifest ' the same great love for his beloved cousin '?

The poor prodigal, however, considered himself lucky. Had he not made good his momentarily precarious title of lord de Raiz, by recovering the full and complete possession of the lands which bore that name? Hope for the recovery of Chantocé gleamed among the shadows of his daily life, as a light burning at night in the black depths of the forest. He knew

that infallible secrets existed, capable of enriching in one day the man who could probe their mystery. Frantically and morbidly vowed to their research — the only straw afloat on the surface of the depths into which he was sinking — he felt himself on the verge of success. Then Chantocé would be his forever — all whims would be realizable, every indulgence would be possible, all wealth would be his, and all power!

## V. Sorcerer

CENTURIES and centuries have expectantly awaited the fabulous discovery of the transmutation of metals. Will it be granted our own epoch to see the realization of this perennial dream? The theoretic possibility of producing synthetic gold by smelting certain common metals in an electric furnace, has been demonstrated, and we may hope to achieve that ultimate revaluation, by what specialists term the same atomic bombardment that produces the decomposition of bodies.

How many alchemists have withered in the green gloom of their laboratories beside the weirdly flickering flames of their ovens, attempting to discover these unknown forces. They knew that precious stones, such as sapphires, turquoises and emeralds, could be imitated; they believed that they could actually

be created. Certain of them even thought they had succeeded. The celebrated Raymond Lully wrote to the king of England: 'You have seen the marvellous feat I accomplished in London, by sprinkling mercurial water over ground crystals; I produced some very fine diamonds and you had little columns made of them for a miniature shrine.' Denis Zacharius, in his *Natural Philosophy*, indicated the manner of employing divine works to manufacture pearls and rubies!

Mercury figured most frequently as the base in these experiments. According to the alchemists, metals were compound bodies of which mercury and sulphur were the common constituent elements. The quantity and proportions of these elements alone, determined the nature of the metal. In order to obtain gold, or better, silver — for is not mercury called *vivum argentum*: quick-silver? it was only a question of determining the proportions of mercury and sulphur which entered into its composition. The prime difficulty was to achieve

the solidification of mercury, which only occurs at around 40° below zero. This was a problem.

Properly speaking, the transmutation of metals, or mercurial process, was not the only method of producing gold; another more direct process was also known. Hermetic writers of the Middle Ages compared the formation of metal to human parturition. The metal was conceived and developed in the bowels of the earth, as a fœtus in its mother's womb.

In the earth's bosom, the miracle was accomplished by the action of the stars; it was their distant and mysterious influence which generated and sustained life. First it produced the dull inferior and mutable metals — lead, iron and copper — then it refined them, transforming them to brilliant and incorruptible metals — gold and silver. It was an incomprehensible gestation which lasted over thousands of years.

In order to imitate Nature's slow and invisible labor, it was only necessary to understand

the source of metal. This source was the Philosopher's Stone. But how could one succeed in discovering or creating it? In the magic crucible which, in commemoration of the astral gestation in the earthy matrix, had been named *the egg,* how and by what sovereign process might one achieve the sublime result? Happy, infinitely happy, would be the man who could achieve it!

The Philosopher's Stone, also termed the Philosopher's Powder, The Great Magistery, The Quintessence and the Great Elixir, was not necessarily a hard and solid body. According to some it was a powder, to others, a fluid. Some called it light and transparent as air; others, violet as amethyst, green as emerald, yellow as topaz, blue as the waves of the sea, variegated as agate. . . . It was claimed to be rich in the most astounding properties — it bestowed wisdom and knowledge. Just as it refined brute matter, so it also ennobled the human soul. Nicholas Flamel said that it extirpated every rootlet of original sin. It also healed

the ills of the body and restored youth to the aged; Vincent de Beauvais asserted that Noah, though 500 years old, was still able to procreate children because he possessed the Philosopher's Stone!

These alchemists drew their knowledge from childish books and exotic manuals crammed with bizarre and cabalistic formulæ. The two principles of the transmutation of metals by mercury and their creation by means of the Philosopher's Stone, were to be found in them, often distinctly defined and often extremely muddled. Often the Philosopher's Stone was cited as the mercury itself! The formulæ all affected disquieting and enigmatic titles: *The Clavicle* of Raymond Lully; the *Mirror of Secrets* and *The Alchemistic Marrow* of Roger Bacon; Arnauld de Villeneuve's *The Flower of Flowers;* Philatetes' *The Tomb of Semiramis Open to the Wise;* G. Ripley's *Book of the Twelve Portals; The Color of the Sun and the Moon,* etc. None of these authors dates from the Middle Ages, but Hermetic form and

doctrine scarcely varied from that time, even up to the 18th century.

The first alchemists invariably believed that no possible change in the order of things could come about without the hand of God; they practiced 'white magic.' At the head of his printed works, the Arab, Geber, one of the forerunners, blesses 'God, creator of all Nature.' Nicholas Flamel too, gave thanks to God 'Whose benevolence,' he said, 'deigned to spread in the earth before me, His unworthy vassal, all the treasures of the riches of the world.'

But finally, desperate through not having been able, with aid from on high, to force the male and female seeds of all metals to unite, the alchemists conceived of calling upon the powers of evil — they sought to interest Hell in their endeavors, mixing black magic and other occult sciences with their alchemy. Side by side with Geber, who left us exact descriptions of mercury, lead, silver, copper, iron, sulphur and arsenic — side by side with Albert

le Grand, who discovered the formula for the preparation of potassium hydroxide by means of calcium [1] — side by side with Raymond Lully, whose *Ars Magna* is a veritable classified encyclopedia of all the sciences of the time — side by side with Arnauld de Villeneuve, who discovered sulphuric, hydrochloric and nitric acids, and side by side with all these alchemists whose brains were not befuddled by vulgar superstition, we find minds which were utterly misled by the mysteries of astrology — astrology, which was the source of alchemy (a connection having been established between the planets and metals in the process of evolution, as we have seen) — and by the mysteries of black magic or the art of evoking evil spirits.

Perhaps that was why alchemy was condemned by pope and king. The first edict of proscription appeared in 1317 — a bull of Pope John XXII. In 1380, Charles V of France

[1] A process now obsolete, but represented by the equation: $Ca(OH)_2 + K_2CO_3 \rightarrow CaCO_3 + 2KOH$. (Translator's note.)

posted his commandments, then in 1406, Henry IV of England followed suit, which did not prevent his successor once-removed, Henry VI, from granting several alchemists authority to manufacture gold and the elixir of life.

Despite the laws, books on occultism were circulated *sub rosa*. Certain of them were written in blood. Mention is made of Gilles de Raiz' trial-record of several of that kind, one of which belonged to a Breton who lived at Tiffauges: a book bound in black leather, half of paper, and half parchment, decorated with red rubrics. It contained formulæ for evoking Belial and Beelzebub and effecting, through their omnipotence, a revelation of the treasures so jealously secreted by Nature.

Magic was not to reach full-bloom until the 16th century, which was to witness the foundation of the universities of occult science. But throughout the Middle Ages, magic and sorcery were quite in fashion. The most absurd superstitions then found credence, even among minds well-informed for their time. The Breton

historian, Bertrand d'Argentré, for instance, gravely relates that Jean V sent three emissaries into Hainaut, to bring back his enemy, Olivier de Blois, a prisoner, with an iron collar about his neck. But, he writes, this collar was one of those enchanted collars, 'which, as they say, burned its victim little by little, and could not be filed off, for it would have burst into flame.'

Princes were swamped by evocators, magicians, astrologers and mountebanks of every stripe and kidney. Many of them were Italians, who claimed to be versed in the occult sciences, whose services were not in the least gratuitous and who, before enriching their employers by the so passionately desired transmutation of metals, commenced by amassing more concrete fortunes for themselves. All the cities of the Breton peninsula were overrun with these greedy adventurers. Aside from their more or less avowed practices, they engaged in the sale of poisons, and when required, they gave instruction in their use. A certain Marc de Milan

brought Arthur de Montauban the toxic substance which was to be used on the unfortunate Gilles de Bretagne, son of Jean V, who had been accused of treason by his brother François I of Brittany. . . . These Italians were the clandestine accomplices of great lords who had been ruined or were anxious to secure succession by doing away with the rightful heir. They were the last resort of countless despondent and tormented spirits. Gilles, who, as we have seen, was at grips with the most acute financial troubles, was doomed to fall into their hands.

However, it was not they who initiated him into the secrets of alchemy and the forbidden sciences. One day, tortured by the thought of complete ruin, he wandered in the streets of Angers. He learned that there was a soldier in the town's prison, condemned for the crime of heresy, who owned a book crammed with incredible things. He went there at once, and the prisoner loaned him the prodigious volume, which was a treatise on both alchemy and dia-

bolic evocation. What a revelation for Gilles! He read it eagerly and returned to the prison several times. Finally, the soldier demanded the return of the work, and Gilles gave it back to him. He had learned enough from it, and his plans were formulated.

He immediately charged messengers to search France and foreign countries, and he filled their purses with gold. They were to make it known that a great, opulent and generous French lord was seeking sorcerers and alchemists. He promised wealth and fame to whomsoever would reveal to him the secret of the Philosopher's Stone. They came running.

Beneath the shadowy arches of the castles of Machecoul and Tiffauges, lit by flickering torches or high-hung sconces, the work began, in accordance with the customary form and ritual requirements. Clothed in white, as the Druids, and barefoot, the sorcerers chanted their magic incantations, drunk with the fumes of odoriferous plants and gasping in the multicolored smoke of burning powder. Mercury

flowed from the mouths of retorts — they would surely succeed in solidifying it — the first stage in the process — then in transforming it to silver. Foremost among his alchemists Gilles had a Parisian jeweler, whose name has not been preserved, who was a specialist in the difficult art of the transmutation of metals. For years, since 1425, and especially since the death of Jean de Craon in 1432, he had been engaging in these experiments. He was there every day, worried and anxious — he was disappointed every day and yet gripped again by undying hope; he was there, urging his workers to find the Philosopher's Stone — the lever that was to lift the world. Alas! months and years passed, and the lever had not been found. The sale of lands continued — the gulf was widening and deepening. Then it was, and at that very moment of acute crisis, that Prélati was to appear. Surely he would prove the saviour.

It was in July 1438. Some months before, on the 20th of January, Gilles had sold Chantocé, and the incidents which had accompanied its

memorable sale had scarcely come to a close. Gilles had lost confidence in his staff of alchemists and he was desperate. He sent one of his intimates, one Eustache Blanchet, a priest of the diocese of Saint-Malo, to Italy, under the false pretext of a mission to the Roman court. He was really charged with bringing back one of those Italians who were so clever at penetrating the shadowy arcana of the occult sciences. Blanchet reached Florence where, at his boarding-house he made the acquaintance of a young tonsured clerk who had been born in the diocese of Lucques, François Prélati. A versatile man, astute enough to know when to speak and when to remain silent, Prélati was a personification of his race. He was twenty-four years old and the world lay before him. He would know how to make his way.

At Gilles' trial, Henriet and Poitou were to testify that, according to certain people, 'For a drink, Prélati would have conjured up the Devil.' A legend was even woven about him — his nationality was even found to be too unro-

mantic, and he was said to be a Hindu sage. A Breton writer of the early 19th century described him as follows: 'A stern and imposing countenance, with flaming eyes; a masculine, resonant voice and a remarkably white beard, marked him as an Oriental.' This Oriental was simply an Italian, and we know nothing of his appearance, other than the fact that, being quite young, he could not have boasted a long white beard.

Conversation between Blanchet and him naturally turned upon the occult sciences. Blanchet was eager to have his table-mate's opinion on these matters usually beyond the grasp of the average man. Prélati confessed himself versed in black magic — of course he knew how to evoke evil spirits. Blanchet said, 'Then come back to Brittany with me — there's a noble lord there who will pay you royally for your aptitude.' 'That's fortunate,' Prélati replied, 'I have a friend named Martel in Nantes; I'd like very much to see him.'

So the sorcerer started off with Blanchet,

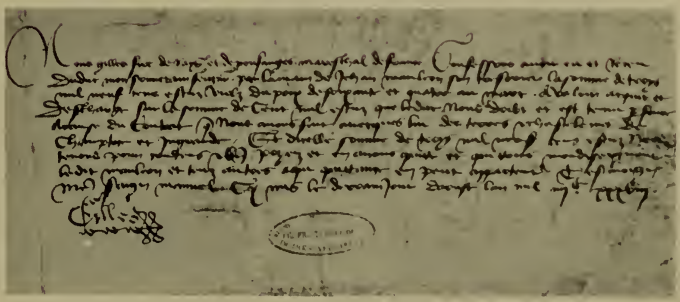
and came to Tiffauges where Prélati soon discovered he was in a congenial environment: he encountered nothing but alchemists and necromancers who had gathered from all sides. Gilles de Sillé, Roger de Briqueville, and various of Gilles' servants had scoured Brittany, Poitou, and even Germany and England for men and women dedicated to the forbidden sciences. Others came from Italy besides Prélati. Some of their names are cited in the proceedings of the trial — François Lombard; Antonio di Palermo; Lenano, authentic marquis de Céva. None of these soothsayers ever made a pretence of being sages; one of them who was even known as 'Louis the Loudmouth' was doubtless a cheap adventurer, and may even have been the one Gilles visited in the Angers prison. Many died on the way, of fatigue or by violence, before reaching Gilles de Raiz' castles, the promised site of their laborious and painstaking activity.

Behold the necromancers at work! Trial records are replete with nightmare descrip-

tions of these fantastic performances. They took place at night, either in the almost impenetrable, inaccessible and soundproof dungeons of the castle of Tiffauges, or in the surrounding meadows. The dim light of a candle flickered in the shadows — the initiates were there, shivering beside a fire they had kindled, and crouched over a 'great round circle,' which had been traced by a sword's point.

The evocation was made in the name of God; it was He who confined the rebellious legions: '*Conjuro vos, Baron, Satan, Belial, Beelzebub,* by the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, by the Virgin Mary and all the Saints, to appear in our presence and to speak to us and do our bidding.' Surely God alone could command such powerful spirits as Belial, Beelzebub and Satan. Treatises on demonology inform us that they were particularly unmanageable gentry, especially John Wier's *Pseudomonarchia Demonum,* which gives us the name and rank of the demons in the dark

SEAL OF GILLES DE RAIZ



RECEIPT SIGNED BY GILLES DE RAIZ

In the Archives of the Loire-Inferieure.

Empire, and enlightens us concerning their frightful specialties.

Belial, who is of seductive physique, a good conversationalist and of pleasing appearance, nevertheless has the most corrupt soul of all the inhabitants of the dark domains. He thrives on vice and pestilence. The Sidonians formerly worshiped him and he had a following in Sodom. He was created directly after Lucifer, joined the revolt of the heavenly legions and was one of the first to be expelled by the flaming sword of the archangel. He commands eighty legions, comprising an army of 522,280 devils.

Beelzebub supersedes him in importance. The Scriptures term him the prince of devils, and nearly all demonists have named him the master of the Realm of Shadows. He is commonly presented to us as being of gigantic stature, with an iron band about his forehead, flaming eyes, arched brows and a horned head. He is furnished with a pair of huge bat's wings, webbed feet, a lion's tail, and his body is cov-

ered with hair. But he is capable of changing his appearance at will, and he assumes the most monstrous forms. In the course of this narrative, he will appear as a leopard!

Satan is his rival for predominance. Treatises on demonology have reserved long articles for this 'particular enemy of Christ,' as he is called. His name signifies 'enemy' in Hebrew. When the angels revolted against God, Satan was governor of the entire northern section of the heavens; he drew innumerable legions after him, and together they all plunged into the frightful gulf where he still rules over them. According to Schelling's *Satanology*, he represents the universal and cosmic principles of evil, and the New Testament names him the prince of this world. In Genesis Satan is represented as a serpent. 'The symbol is accurate and profound, for the devil insinuates himself into our spirits imperceptibly, and poisons us from the inside.' According to certain demonists, it is possible that the Proserpine of the old legends was the pagan manifestation of

Satan, for her name comes from *proserpere*, which means, to crawl.

Besides a devil of such colossal authority, who might Baron be — the demon Gilles de Raiz invoked as frequently? He is a 'poor devil,' of slender enough notoriety; he is not mentioned in any manual, and when he was cited, the scribe was content to write, 'Baron, a devil invoked by Gilles de Raiz.' The accusation names another infernal spirit, one Oriens. Oriens, or Orias, is better known than Baron. A demon familiar to astrologers and sorcerers, he possesses the title of grand marquis in the Realm of Shadows, where he commands thirty legions. He is represented as possessing a lion's face, and he rides a horse with a serpent's tail — a viper is coiled about either of his wrists, and he is capable of turning a man into an animal.

'Conjuro vos, Baron, Satan, Belial, Beelzebub,' Prélati would repeat, and the incantation lasted for two hours. The assistants stood fervently hoping, their hearts pounding against

their ribs. In order to get into the spirits' good graces, or more or less ameliorate their evil tempers, they offered them turtledoves, cocks or milk-white pigeons.

One day in 1439, in the castle of Tiffauges, Gilles and Prélati were crouched over the ritual circle, in the center of which, cabalistic words 'in the form of a coat-of-arms' had been inscribed. The penetrating odors of incense, myrrh, aloes and saffron rose from glowing charcoal which was kindled in clay pots, and floated on the heavy atmosphere. Prélati conjured the spirits to leave their fiery gulfs and appear for a few moments to describe what no man had ever understood — the prodigious mysteries, the science of things uncreated and to come, and the meaning of life and death.

The windows had been opened wide to permit the spirits to enter, but as always they refused to appear. Prélati took courage — speaking for Gilles, he said: 'Heed my voice — I will promise you all, except my soul and my

life, everything, if you consent to grant me knowledge and power.' Gilles even specified the stupendous powers he desired. He wanted the power to conquer his enemies and overthrow castles at will; he wanted a single word, gesture or glance of his to pulverize high battlements and disperse countless armies. In these mad requests we still hear the voice of his ineradicable pride, speaking even louder than his greedy lust for wealth.

There was a formula said to be infallible — it consisted of pricking the little finger and drawing a few drops of blood, with which the demon's summons was to be signed. Collin de Plancy's *Dictionnaire satanique* tells us that one day in the 16th century, a young German named Michael Schramm pierced his little finger in this manner, and the devil appeared and planted a magic root in the hole. From then on, locks opened at the slightest touch and gold coin was drawn to him as by a magnet. But in 1613, seized by remorse in the midst of his ac-

cumulating wealth, the young German immured himself in the monastery of the Jesuits of Molshem, and recanted.

A magician from Picardy, named Jean Langlois, suggested that Gilles employ this system of the pact signed by blood. The scene took place in a meadow near Machecoul. Gilles held the pact in his hand, and Jean proceeded with the usual incantations. But the devil, who up to then had turned a deaf ear to his supplications, doubtless also had no eyes with which to see! He refused to leave his underworld estate.

Gilles accused his evocator of being a buffoon, sent him about his business and proceeded to repeat the experiment with the bloody signature, but with another operator — the evocator known as du Mesnil. The same negative result! Not only did Beelzebub, Baron and Belial refuse to appear, bringing the recipe which would enable Gilles to save himself, but the situation went from bad to worse, for all these consultations of sages, necromancers and

magicians were scarcely free of charge. The money scraped together from sales and loans not only did not reimburse him for his ruinous expenditures, but went its way into the pockets of these English, Italian and Picardian adventurers. So much so, the *Mémoire des Héritiers* assures us, that towards the end of his life, Gilles de Raiz was more a pauper than a beggar; he lacked even necessities, while his lackeys, his flatterers and his charlatans gorged themselves with his victuals and were swollen with his gold. He no longer knew what devil to appeal to; he grew skeptical and wondered to what he should attribute his bad luck.

Two women had said to him: 'To succeed, you'll have to forget your chapel and give up your religious practices.' He had paid no attention to them, not wishing, after all, to have a falling out with heaven. Had that been the cause of his failures? Then again, perhaps the hens, turtledoves and pigeons which he had offered, bleeding, to the evil spirits, constituted too genteel a sacrifice for such unmanageable

gentlemen. It was during these hours of discouragement that Prélati, the resourceful man, prompted him with the means — this time infallible — of prevailing upon the recalcitrant legions of the damned.

## VI. Criminal

'THE victims you have been offering to Satan, to Belial, to Baron and Beelzebub,' Prélati suggested, 'are poor offerings, most certainly unworthy of them. Why not bring them more persuasive proof of your devotion? Offer them the flesh, the entrails and the blood of sacrificial children.'

How could Prélati have dared make such a proposition, had he not known into what depths of ignominy his master had sunk? For that matter, for Gilles to offer the devil blood which he had shed, would not have perceptibly aggravated his crimes or his responsibility. For fourteen years, according to the act of accusation; for five years, according to Poitou, but according to Gilles himself, who was certainly the best-informed, since 1432, the date of his grandfather's death, he had given him-

self over to the most abject depravity. His *hôtel* de la Suze and the castles of Machecoul, Tiffauges and Chantocé, concealed resurrected scenes of ancient Sodom.

This warrior who had been overwhelmed with honors, this young Marshal who paraded in gleaming armor astride his brilliantly caparisoned horse, this generous patron, acclaimed by the multitudes to whom he offered the most romantic and edifying spectacles and the most luxurious banquets, was like the whitened sepulchres mentioned in the New Testament. His was the cruelest and most corrupt soul of all. He was surrounded by lewdness, cruelty and decay. The voices of the young choristers in his collegiate chanted the praise of God, but the owners of those angelic voices themselves, had been polluted by their master.

The battlements of the castles rose proudly to great heights; the pointed roof of the dungeon pierced the blue sky, but within blood flowed and the cries of victims were smothered. Formerly, in hours of danger, poor peasants

had hastened to seek refuge within these stout fortresses; now their children were lured inside and slaughtered. The cult of the devil — since baptised the Black Mass — was solemnized with all its rites of hysterical sadism and bloody brutality.

Children who entered its sombre vaults were never again to see the light of day. Many of their names are known, which were gathered by the inquiry and re-echoed in the court-room. Similarly, many of them figured in the deposition of witnesses and the confessions of the accused.[1] We know only the age of others, their

[1] Thus, the disappearance of young Loëssard, from la Roche-Bernard, attested to in the civil inquiry by his mother and three neighbors, was confirmed at the trial by Griart and Poitou. The death of one of Prélati's pages, attested to in the inquiry by Georges le Barbier, a tool-maker living near the gateway of the castle of Machecoul, was confirmed by the same Griart and Poitou. The disappearance of young Bernard le Camus, of Brest, was first attested to by the young Rodigo couple of Bourgneuf-en-Retz, with whom he had lived, and then at the trial by Griart and Poitou, who described how his throat had been cut and his body cremated.

occupations, and the names of people with whom they boarded or the names of shady intermediaries who gave them over to their executioner.

These names, these facts and these indications of events, places and ages, which have come down to us through centuries, will attest forever to the truth of the accusations.

There was the son of Guillaume Brice of Saint-Étienne-de-Montluc, 'a handsome lad' named Jamet, ten years old, whose father 'who was a poor man' had sent him out to beg; attested to by Jean le Meignen and six other people. There were the sons of the late Jean Bernart of Port-Launay, near Couëron, and Julien Menguer's, of the same place; both of whom had been sent to beg at Machecoul; sworn to by Guillaume Fourage and three other neighbors. André Barbe, a shoemaker of Machecoul, further related the disappearance of Guillaume Jeudon's child, who lived with Guillaume Hilairet, and that of a seven-year-old child of an unidentified person, whose

father wandered everywhere searching for his poor little one. Georges le Barbier of Machecoul, deposed in his turn and said that his eighteen-year-old son, named Guillaume, lived with Pelletier, dressmaker to the lady de Raiz. He vanished even while playing ball with his playmates after dinner. The disappearances of the Jeudon and le Barbier children were also corroborated by Jean Roucin and the Hilairet couple. The latter declared that Gilles de Sillé and Roger de Briqueville had begged for the services of young Guillaume Jeudon, whom they employed as apprentice-furrier, to take a message to the castle of Machecoul. The child left and never again returned. The same couple confirmed the disappearance of the sons of Jean Roucin and Alexis Châtelier.

There was the eight-year-old son of Jeanette and Guillaume Sergent of Machecoul; his parents related how, having gone out to plow a field in order to sow hemp, they had left their son at home to take care of his little sister, aged

a year and a half. When they returned, the child was no longer there.

There was the twelve-year-old son of Mathelin Thouars of Touvoye,[2] whose father remained inconsolable, according to the four witnesses from the same place who related that 'Thouars was a poor man.' There was the eight-year-old child of the widow Edelin, formerly wife of Jean Bonneau of Machecoul, who vanished while 'going to school, same being very white and pretty and a lovable child.' He had lived with his mother near the castle of Machecoul, and had been lost for about eight years. The poor woman went on to tell of several other similar disappearances; those of the little Roucin and the little Jeudon, mentioned above; that of Macé Sorin's son and the child of a certain Oran, inhabitant of Saint-Mesme, not far from Machecoul.

There was a 'handsome page,' native of the suburbs of Dieppe. He spent fifteen days in

[2] Touvois (L–I) and not Tonnaye, as the Maulde copy has it.

Prélati's service, and then vanished. When Perrine, wife of Clément Rondeau of Machecoul, asked Prélati what had become of his handsome page, the Italian answered, 'I was certainly deceived on his score; the kid ran off, after stealing two crowns from me.' There were the two children of Guillaume Hamelin of Fresnay in the land of Raiz. Eight witnesses had heard the outcries of the parents, who later came to testify at the trial. There was the little son of Guillemette, wife of Micheau-Bouer (Bouyer), of Saint-Cyr-en-Raiz, a 'pale and pretty child.' He had gone to Machecoul to beg alms, and after that no one heard any news of him. There was Bernard le Camus, fifteen years old, who had come to Bourgneuf from Brest, to learn French; he lived with Guillaume Rodigo. He never saw his Brittany again, according to the word of six people who came to testify concerning his disappearance. There was little Aysée, ten years old, whose loss, already confirmed by the widow Edelin, was related at great length by his parents who, to

their misery, had come from Saint-Père to live at Machecoul. They had sent him to beg alms at the castle, 'where the lord de Raiz was, at the time.' From then on, they heard no further of their poor child; they only knew that the day he presented himself for this distribution of alms, the girls had been admitted first, and then the boys. When the distribution was over, a little girl heard that someone in the castle had said to the child, 'You haven't had anything to eat, come back again.'

There were the two children of Jeanne and Eustache Drouet of Saint-Léger, one ten years old and the other seven. They knew that the sire de Raiz distributed alms and also that the people of the town of Machecoul occasionally did the same. They went there — certain people recognized them, but they never came back home. There was the son of the widow of Regnaud Douette, of the parish of Notre-Dame de Nantes, a schoolboy twelve years old, who had left two years before. His mother and several witnesses said that they had had word

of him only fifteen days before. As a matter of fact, Perrine Martin, who was held in the prison of Nantes, confessed to the poor woman that she had brought her son to Gilles de Raiz, at his la Suze manor. Gilles had commanded her to take the child to the gatekeeper of the castle of Machecoul, which she had done. There was the nine-year-old child of Jean Jeuvret of Saint-Croix de Nantes, who went to school and frequented la Suze, and whose disappearance was attested to by four people. There was the son of Jean Hubert, of the parish of Saint-Léonard de Nantes, a school-boy thirteen years old. He had been eight days in the service of one Prinçay, who was 'a squire of the sire de Raiz.' Prinçay owned a horse that the child did not dare to ride. His parents said to him, 'Leave Prinçay and return to school.' The little boy answered, 'I'd rather go with another gentleman of Gilles de Raiz' escort, called Espadin; he promised to treat me well and take me to the country.' His parents confidently let him go to la Suze, where Espadin was to be found.

This latter was a Scotch knight, whose real name was Spading. The little boy never reappeared, according to the testimony of his parents and a dozen other individuals.

There was the eight-year-old son of Denis de Lémion, whose mother and four witnesses confirmed his disappearance. One day when the lord de Raiz was at la Suze, one of his intimates came to the mother and said, 'Let me have your son, I will show him the mansion of the archdeacon of Merles;[3] then I'll give him a loaf of bread.' The boy followed the man and the next day he went back to claim his loaf, but 'since that time he has not returned, nor has anyone heard what happened to him.' There was the child of Jeanne and Guibelet Delit, of the parish of Saint-Denys de Nantes. He was in the habit of visiting a certain Cherpy, at la Suze, one of the lord de Raiz' cooks, who employed him to turn the spit. He vanished,

[3] The word Merles has never been identified; perhaps it should be la Mée, to the north of Comté-Nantais, whose titular head may have owned a house in Nantes, or perhaps it was simply an imaginary name.

and his mother, suspecting the truth, said to Master Jean Briaud, who also lived at la Suze, 'They say the sire de Raiz has little children caught, and murders them.' The remark was reported at la Suze, and two of the master's men soon came and threatened the poor woman, who was forced to retract her statement. There was little Jean, thirteen years old, whose tutor, Jean Toublanc of Saint-Étienne-de-Montluc, having gone on a trip to Saint-Julien-de-Vouvantes, left him at home, and did not find him there when he returned. There was the son of Jean Fougère, of the parish of Saint-Donacien de Nantes, twelve years old and 'very handsome.'

There were the sons of Guillaume Avril, Eonnet de Villeblanche and Perrot Dagaie. There were two haberdashers, the Robin brothers, who had come from Chanteloup near Rennes, their wares upon their backs, and disappeared in the land of Raiz. There was little Olivier, son of Jean Darel of Saint-Saturnin de Nantes, about eight years old. His father was

sick in bed — the child was playing on the rue du Marché with little comrades of his own age. He was kidnapped and taken God-knows-where. His parents, grandmother and a neighbor's wife all attested to the fact.[4]

There were many others, boys and girls. No girls were named, but indications that many little girls were slaughtered may be found in several places in the record of the trial. The act of accusation said, *tam masculis quam femellis* — as many boys as girls, and Poitou's confession was no less explicit.

Sinister scouts lured them to the fatal place. Ruses, promises and every sort of trap was utilized. The depositions of the wretched parents were singularly significant. Here is one

[4] All the preceding names were taken from the civil inquiry: a good many others might be cited, from the pages of the double trial. Here are some of them: the nephew of the prior of Cheneré; a young man whose sister, Catherine Thierry, wife of a painter living in Nantes, had brought him to Machecoul, to be a choir-boy; the son of a certain Pierre Coupperie, that of Jean Maguet, etc. . . .

which is quite striking in its simplicity: 'Perrone — or Perrine — Loëssart, living at la Roche-Bernard, deposes under oath that two years ago this September, the said lord de Raiz, returning from Vannes, took lodging in the home of Jehan Collin of the aforementioned place, and retired. The witness then lived across the street from said house, having a young son aged ten, who went to school. One of the men of the said lord de Raiz, named Poitou, coveted him, and came to Perrone, asking her to allow her son to lodge with him. He said he would dress him well and do much good for him, declaring also that the boy himself would be the cause of his, Poitou's, also receiving much benefit(!). Perrone answered, 'My son goes to school and is learning rapidly; I would not care to take him out of school.' Poitou then swore that he was equally anxious for the boy to continue going there, and furthermore promised a hundred *sous* to buy the boy a gown. Upon this manifestation and further promise of good will, the mother author-

ized him to take the child with him. Shortly after, Poitou brought her four *livres* for the gown, but she said, ' There are twenty *sols* more due.' Poitou replied that he had only promised four *livres,* and the next day the boy went off with him, in the company of the sire de Raiz, on a little horse which Poitou had bought from Jehan Collin. Since then this woman has had no further news of her son.'

This banal technique of seduction — the offer of a present to the mother or the child, may be found here and there in the pages of the investigation. One day Poitou appeared at Raoulet Delaunet's, the tailor, with the son of Eonnet de Villeblanche, and ordered a doublet for the child. The child then disappeared. What had Poitou promised Bernard le Camus, the young Breton who was being boarded by the Rodigos at Bourgneuf, in order to learn French — what had he whispered in his ear? No one knows — the boy refused to repeat it and he left without caring to tell anyone where he was going. He ' left his robe, his shoes and

hood, and went out in his doublet. Thenceforth nobody saw him, or heard news of him.'

At other times the kidnappers steadfastedly maintained their incognito. The son of Jean Roucin of Machecoul was accosted by Gilles de Sillé, who kept his cloak raised and had a mask over his face. The boy had frequented Sillé and could not have been frightened by his disguise; he followed the wretch, who was, however, recognized by two women. Sillé had a brother named Michel, who was a prisoner in England, and the rumor was current in the land that the English had demanded twenty-three male children as his ransom. That was chiefly said during the first years of this gloomy drama, when the Roucin, Sorin and Jeudon children vanished one by one. No one then suspected the frightful truth.

But of all these scouts and procuresses, Gilles de Sillé, Roger de Briqueville, Henriet and Stéphane Buchet, the most celebrated was surely the famous Perrine Martin, called la Meffraie. Michelet has made a hobgoblin of

her; he has so completely blackened and caricatured her, that one wonders how such an ogress could have approached little children. In reality, the only indication we have of her appearance figures in a deposition in which she was not named, and there is even room for doubt about the identity of the person cited in the deposition. The Fourage woman deposes to have seen 'an old woman she did not recognize, in a shabby gray dress and a black hood; she was a little woman and had a young boy in her company and said she was going to Launay with the said child; then she saw her returning from there a short time after, say two or three days, without the said child; so asked her what had become of him, and the woman answered that she had placed him to board with a good master.' A good master!

Then what do we know about Perrine Martin? Only this: before or after her arrest, she confessed having abducted children. She lived outside the walls of the manor de la Suze, and

it was easy for her to enter and leave it without attracting attention.

Brought by her, Poitou, Sillé or Gilles' other trusties, the children went over the drawbridge and crossed the sinister threshold in the hope of generous alms or a situation as page. They entered the lair — what was then to happen to them? The pages of the double trial — civil and criminal — shed a frightful light on the proceedings. The thickness of the walls smothered the cries and death-rattle of the victims, but the day was to come when someone would have to speak. Gilles was to speak, and Poitou and Griart were to speak, and Blanchet and still others. It is through their testimony and their sworn avowals that we know what happened at la Suze, at Machecoul, Tiffauges, Chantocé and other stations in the Marshal's travels. They were scenes of morbid perversion, scenes which were unique in the history of sexual abomination. . . .

Since to return the poor victim to its family would have displayed the most dangerous im-

prudence, as it would have meant the stake, the child was doomed to perish and thus carry the compromising secret with it to the grave. This is the usual psychology of grossly vicious murder. But before it expired, its death itself — an aphrodisiac spectacle — was to be the source of inconceivable enjoyment to its butcher.

By Gilles' order, the child was gagged and then, with a cord about its neck, suspended a few feet above the ground. It already suffered the agony of death — it was choking, and its horrified eyes seemed to search for help. The heart slowed its beating and life was about to cease. . . . Then Gilles, who had been ravished with delight at the terror of the poor child, ordered the cord to be cut. The child embraced its saviour, who took it on his knees, cajoled it and overwhelmed it with affectionate caresses. The child regained confidence, was fully reassured and its tears were soon dry. Gilles found a new delight in this so tenderly manifested joy — but it was shortlived! The

order was given to gag the victim anew and suspend it once more, and this time the threat was carried to its end and the child drew its last breath.

At other times it was with the dagger that he, Sillé or Henriet consummated the frightful sacrifice. Slowly, very slowly, to more fully relish the vision of the ultimate convulsions, an incision was made in the back of the child's neck. Or better still, its neck was brutally broken with a heavy rod. Each of these different modes of murder gave birth to new curiosity and stirred him to intensified delight. Gilles gloated over his victims' sighs, their contortions, ghastly grins and death-rattle, and he drank the last breath of the dying child. All of this was to be reported by Poitou and Griart and to be confessed by Gilles himself.

The limbs were amputated and the entrails were exposed. Gilles seized the head and placed it next to other heads and questioned his accomplices as to which was loveliest. He bestowed long kisses on the bloodless face which

had been named the winner of the abominable contest. The sight of corpses soon revived his lust. Carnal indulgence, he confessed, and Poitou confirmed his words, procured him less acute enjoyment than that provoked by the sight of death, prolonged, then sped — or, if one may say so, multiplied and skillfully led to the final moment. It was the evil enjoyment of the feline which plays with its victim and allows it to escape, only to ravish it shortly after of its joy at being saved. These were the pleasures of a brute, but a refined brute — it was a dilettantism of cruelty and sadism, in which the cruelty and the sadism rivaled each other to produce dynamic effects on the senses.

Gilles was to find another purpose for these holocausts. The victims were to serve his satanic enterprises. Through them and through their sacrifice, in accordance with Prélati's advice, he would obtain the good will of the evil spirits he had till then so vainly attempted to evoke. He was to spread the viscera of his young victims before them. He was to collect in metal

basins the blood which gushed in torrents from their opened arteries, in order to trace on the soil with the purple of this irresistible ink, the crosses and hermetic symbols which were a sovereign summons to the shadowy powers. Further, he was to have the mysterious books of the Cabala and black magic copied with it.

One day Henriet and Poitou unexpectedly entered their master's chamber. Gilles held in his hands the bloody heart and eyes of a child. He wrapped these dismal remains in a white cloth and placed them under a glass bell on the mantel of the fireplace. He ordered the door closed and forbade entrance to anyone. Then, with Prélati he went to the room known as the evocation-chamber, about which we now possess no information. He offered these quivering remains to the stubborn spirits, but alas! they were no more moved by this child's flesh, heart and blood, than by the sacrifice of innocent doves. Then the Italian carried the sinister fragments out of the castle, and buried

them at the foot of Saint-Vincent's chapel, and Gilles fell once more into despair. But soon he was to repeat the same infamous practices, pricked by the double needle of his vice and his avarice, and the crimes cumulated and mounted like the stories of a hideous and infernal tower.

From 1432 to 1440, according to the pages of the trial-record, at least 200 children perished at Machecoul, Tiffauges, Chantocé, the manor de la Suze and even elsewhere, in private houses. The act of accusation declared that Gilles 'took and killed, not only ten, nor twenty, but thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, one hundred, two hundred and more little children'; in fact, it is impossible to accurately calculate the number. Henriet and Poitou confessed that they two alone furnished him with more than sixty, of which eleven or twelve perished in the *hôtel* de la Suze, in the very heart of Nantes. Forty children, they both declared, were sacrificed at Machecoul. In all, a great quantity of bones, among which there were forty-five

skulls, were recovered from the depths of one of Chantocé's towers, to be transported to Machecoul, where Poitou assisted in their cremation.

If it was difficult to draw up the fatal balance at the time the controversy was raging over this monstrous business, how much more arduous would it be today! The historian must be content with the round sum cited in the act of accusation, and not contested by Gilles himself. Then, Gilles de Raiz, Marshal of France, sacrificed to his own passions and the vainly-implored power of evil spirits, a minimum of 200 children, boys and girls.

Did he also sacrifice women? The trial-record is silent on this point, but since we do not possess all its sections, we must fall back upon the account of the historian Monstrelet who, having been born at the end of the 14th century, was Gilles' contemporary. He wrote that the Marshal confessed having had several pregnant women murdered. One may wonder whether his sadism aimed at the woman herself or — a monstrosity of which Gilles was

after all capable — the child, the fruit torn from the womb of its mother.

All these victims vanished; they left nothing of themselves but bleached skeletons. The assertion of the modern Breton historian is purely fantastic when, apropos of the arrest of the Marshal at his castle of Machecoul, he relates that, 'A swarm of unfortunate young girls, reserved for shame and death, escaped, as a choir of angels escaped from hell.'[5] Alas! hell never gives up its victims.

[5] Pître Chevalier, *La Bretagne ancienne,* 480 — Poitou seems really to have been the only victim scheduled for slaughter, who escaped it. He was twenty-two years old when he was brought to Gilles. At the moment the latter was about to stab him with his dagger, Sillé remarked that he was a handsome lad, "pulcher garcio" and that it would be preferable to keep him as a page. Gilles lowered his weapon, but made Poitou swear to neither speak of what had happened, nor of anything he might see in the future. (Poitou's confession.)

## VII. Madman?

THE case of Gilles de Raiz has preoccupied philosophers, littérateurs and doctors. Is it a case for a specialist in mental aberration, or was Gilles simply a bloodthirsty sadist? In other words, to what extent may he be held responsible for his actions? Let us try to study his sombre physiognomy in the lurid light of his past. We will try — but, may we flatter ourselves that we will be able to depict it, separated as we are from him by nearly 500 years?

Above all, he appears to us to have been distinctly of his period, and he never escaped his brutal yet mystical environment. He had received a dual education — an education based first on force and authority, and then on deeply religious principles, as the rest of his contemporaries. These two forces were at constant war within him; it was a perpetual struggle be-

tween unspeakable appetites and fears which were frequently superstitious in origin.

Orphaned at an early age, he had nothing before him but deplorable examples. His rise to the peak of military achievement was not at all the fruit of his talent, or a reward for brilliant service, for he was aided more by circumstance than by any exceptional native gifts. Nor did he display unusual intelligence in the course of his alchemistic research; his mind was not over concerned with the urge to make scientific discoveries. He was doubtless an artist — that fact cannot be denied, but his artistic potentialities were constantly marred by his vainglorious parade of them.

What this particular Maecenas lacked was good taste, and he lacked it constantly, totally and hopelessly. Surrounded by flattery, he did not perceive the dangerous web which was being woven about him. His credulity was boundless and every transaction he engaged in, whether it was a loan, a sale or an exchange, turned out badly for him. He was cheated right

and left, and the files of the trial-record swarm with incidents any one of which would stamp its victim with ridicule in our time.

The wisemen, alchemists, necromancers and charlatans by whom he was surrounded, well-informed on elementary questions of demonology, concocted the most incredible farces to maintain their grip on him. If he ever became doubtful in the face of the crudeness and inefficacy of their methods, he soon repented of his hesitation. Occasionally he gave signs of growing angry, actually became angry and ousted the impostor. But a brazen evocator needed only to declare: 'We saw the devil — he assumed such-and-such a shape and it was under such-and-such circumstances,' for the Marshal to become immediately reimbued with the utmost confidence.

Prélati above all had the gift of making him swallow the most fantastic tales. How could Gilles have failed to believe in this sapient man who had already, in Florence, in the presence of a physician named Jean de Fontenel,

summoned evil spirits from their infernal kingdom? The ritual circle had been drawn on the floor and the magic formulæ had been uttered. Then there appeared a score of birds of dark plumage, resembling ravens.[1] They made no sound. But some time later, at the home of the same Fontenel, Baron appeared in flesh and blood. He consented to make a pact with Prélati, pending the sacrifice of a fowl, or better still, the limbs of a child, if he wished to make more certain of success.

The same Baron was to appear again to Prélati, this time at Josselin, in Brittany, clad in a violet silk cloak. Another time — Gilles was then at Bourges — Baron brought the Italian some black powder on a slate tray, com-

[1] The raven is, as we know, the bird of ill-omen *par excellence;* it may be found in all supernatural legends, where it heralds sorrow, disaster and death, and it was considered of distinctly diabolic origin. Pierre Délancre relates that when the necromantic priests celebrated the Sabbath mass, they utilized a black host and chalice, and at the elevation of the host, they chanted the words, 'Blackbird, blackbird,' thus invoking the devil.(Pierre Délancre, deceased 1630.)

manding him to send it to Gilles in a silver receptacle. A messenger immediately left for Bourges, but Gilles, who had been duped so often, did not keep the false talisman about him very long.

Aloes, incense and myrrh smoked in shiny censers; the words of evocation were pronounced, and the devil sprang up. A strange thing! He always showed himself when Gilles was absent. Ten or twelve times he appeared to Prélati — when he was alone! One day he came in the person of a charming young man about twenty-five years old, stayed a moment and vanished without having said a word.

They were hollow apparitions, and Prélati vainly tried to guarantee their authenticity. Gilles grew impatient, for the abyss was widening before him, and he urged the Italian to reach some tangible end. After a further interview with the spirits of darkness, Prélati finally announced good news: 'The devil,' he said, 'showed me a great hoard of golden nuggets.' 'Golden nuggets!' exclaimed the Marshal, 'I

want to see them.' 'Certainly,' answered the magician, and they both went to the treasure-chamber. But scarcely had Prélati, who was walking ahead, opened the door, than he drew back horrified; a snake the girth of a dog was crawling about the floor, a vigilant guardian of the magic nuggets.[2] Gilles took to his heels, but soon curiosity and greed overcame his fear. The Marshal seized a crucifix in which a piece of the true Cross was inlaid, and behind Prélati, who warned him that under such circumstances it was not wise to carry a crucifix, he crossed the perilous threshold. Fortunately, the monster had disappeared. A mass of yellow dust was strewn upon the floor, and Gilles took some in his hands — Horror! He recognized the falseness of the metal: the devil had once again made a fool of him.

Despite persistent deception, confidence was so strong in him, and so well-rooted in his heart,

[2] It was while in the form of a serpent that Satan made his first temptation. Beelzebub also is said to have appeared in the form of a snake.

that he questioned the devil without rhyme or reason, or at least on scarcely serious matters. If, at Bourgneuf, in the house of the Franciscan friars, he begged the evil spirit to secure him the duke of Brittany's favor, at another time he asked it this simple question bearing on the future: 'Am I, or am I not going to see the duke?' The devil answered in the affirmative, and Gilles immediately set out.

After all, why should we be particularly astonished? Have we not, even in these strenuous times, seen celebrities of the scientific world allow themselves to be mystified with an ingenuousness as astonishing as Gilles de Raiz'? Do we not every day see cultivated minds who, if they do not, as certain of their wives, consult clairvoyants, still believe in the crudest fabrications and are victims of fashionable manias or collective psychoses propagated by the Press or the drawing-room? Every period has had its superstitions, its buffoons and its dupes.

But what is most surprising, was not Gilles' naïveté, great as it was, but Prélati's constant

verbal guarantee of his apparitions and his meetings with the devil. Either the Italian, through having tried to hypnotize others, succeeded in finally hypnotizing himself or, an actor to his fingertips, he intended to play the comedy to its triumphal end at any price, and risk all to attain all.

Poitou and Blanchet did not see the devil, but they too stoutly believed in Prélati's circumstantial declarations. At the trial, Poitou was to say: 'the devil certainly appeared—he bore the form of a leopard,[3] and trod on a rug which was stretched out on the ground.' Blanchet, on the other hand, related a strange scene. One day when the Italian was closeted alone with the spirit, in a room in the castle of Tiffauges, a great clamor was heard within and the noise as of someone beating a bed-cover with a rod. The wretched evocator was certainly writhing in the claws of the demon; he howled under the blows. Trembling, Gilles and

[3] Probably Beelzebub, whose transformations are countless: ass, ox, fly, dragon, woman . . . etc.

his companions listened to the uproar, but did not dare enter the room where the astounding scene was taking place. Gilles commanded Blanchet to enter, and when Blanchet opened the door he heard groans issuing from an aperture which had been pierced in the floor of a room above — they were the groans of a seriously wounded man.

Blanchet came back and reported the fact to his master, and soon Prélati, pale, frightened and exhausted, came out of the room. He said that the devil, who had been in an extremely bad humor, had thrashed him within an inch of his life. The beating earned him a bad fever and eight days in bed. How could Gilles have doubted the story? Didn't Prélati bear the marks of the blows he had received?

A Poitevin magician named Jean de la Rivière certainly deserves a place among the cleverest stage-managers who succeeded the Italian. La Rivière operated chiefly at night, and claimed to have had meetings with diabolic spirits under cover of darkness. One night, fol-

lowed by Gilles, Poitou and Henriet, he went to a meadow near the castle of Tiffauges, where he told his companions to ' Meet me at the edge of this wood.' Alone, with torch in hand and wearing a breastplate, he disappeared among the great trees. Soon the metallic sound of a sword striking a hard body, the uproar of a terrible struggle and piercing shrieks were heard — the evocator was surely at grips with the demons. Gilles, Poitou and Henriet trembled, speechless and rooted to the earth. Jean de la Rivière reappeared, bruised and panting, and said he had seen the devil, in the form of a leopard. The feline had approached him and passed by without saying a word. But then, what about the blows and cries? The evocator did not even take the trouble to explain them.

Jean de la Rivière was wrong not to have deceived them. Some days after, he appeared before Gilles, saying, ' To succeed, I shall need many things which I'll have to go home to get.' Gilles gave him twenty gold crowns for his trip, and Jean de la Rivière pocketed the

money, left and never took the trouble to return.

The affair at Angers was no less indicative. Gilles was staying in that town, at the *Lion d'Argent*. He summoned a jeweler, who was reputed to have been an expert alchemist. Gilles gave him a silver *marc* for experimental purposes. The jeweler shut himself in and double-locked the door, and his experiments were doubtless conscientious; for soon he no longer spoke of coming out. Patiently Gilles awaited the results. When the famous alchemist finally decided to show himself again, he was dead-drunk — he had changed the silver into wine, which nevertheless gives some indication of his talents. Gilles called him a drunkard, and went no further in the matter.

This confidence and simplicity, so to speak — if one may use such harsh words about so eminent an individual — were not only put to the proof in matters of alchemy and occultism, but also manifested themselves in the most ordinary situations in which he found himself

involved. A woman appeared, some time after the death of Jeanne d'Arc, who passed herself off as the real Jeanne d'Arc — she who had died at the stake having been a false Jeanne. Just as was to happen four centuries later, on the occasion of the mysterious death of Louis XVII, the people came to believe that Jeanne had escaped.

Her real name was Jeanne des Armoises. Being probably aware of the Marshal's simplicity of mind, the adventuress came to visit him in 1439, at his castle of Tiffauges. Gilles was convinced that there was great similarity between the woman he received and the one of whom he had formerly been escort. He entrusted her to his lieutenant, Jean de Siquenville, but the latter was soon arrested for brigandism, about the time the dauphin arrived in Poitou. Jeanne des Armoises was constrained to seek her fortune elsewhere, but was later forced to confess the imposture to Charles VII. It was said that the resemblance between the two young girls was so striking that even

CHATEAU DE CHANTOCE, ANJOU

MANOIR DE LA TOUCHE

Built at Nantes by Duc Jean V. In this house the Bishop Jean de Malestroit died

Jeanne d'Arc's brothers were deceived. That is possible: but they were simple peasants — a Marshal of France should have been more perspicacious.

One cannot say that, living a camp life and little in touch with reality, he had perhaps acquired that confidence which is so antithetic to the professional acumen of lawyers and business men, and so frequently incapacitates soldiers for the battle of life. That would be going too far, for Gilles would still surpass the norm. It was this lack of judgment, and certainly this faintness of heart which made him sign the famous proxy given to Briqueville — a proxy enabling Roger to ruin him at any time he so desired, and ruin the future of his daughter Marie de Raiz. What concern could he have felt for other people's children, since his own child was so pitifully worthless in his eyes?

The abuse of fermented beverages to which Gilles abandoned himself, has been offered as an excuse for these inconsistencies. The *Mé-*

*moire des Héritiers* attested to the semi-intoxication in which he lived. The act of accusation stated that he was passionately fond of sumptuous dinners: '*castrimargiam,*' which the learned Ducange explained by the words, *Gulæ concupiscentiam.*[4] After the incident in the woods of Tiffauges, when Jean de la Rivière saw the devil pass by in the form of a leopard, Gilles and his companions returned to the castle, and to celebrate that joyful event, they passed the night in interminable drinking bouts. But all this is explanation — not excuse. This particular vice augmented the others, rather than extenuated them. But all of this *does* define a temperament, and throws light upon that moral physiognomy we call a mind.

Would it be possible to explain his frightful descent by the effect of the solitude into which he suddenly found himself plunged? He had lived a tumultuous life, and known the luxuri-

[4] Literally, 'lechery of the gullet.' (Translator's note.)

ous celebrations of the Court; he had paraded at the side of the Maid through reconquered villages, and his social life had been intense. Suddenly he was transplanted into the midst of a God-forsaken countryside, surrounded by the glorious but melancholy panorama of the great Loire, the setting of Tiffauges with its tangled underbrush, and the swampy meadows of Machecoul. He felt the sadness of isolation, and at dusk he heard the phantasmal cries of the nightbirds. Did this environment work upon his high-strung mind? Did boredom gnaw and finally eat away his will? Did it drive Gilles de Raiz to perverse practices, as it constantly leads other men to neurasthenia and suicide? We are not in a position to shed the least light on the matter.

Nevertheless, Gilles did not attempt to throw off the burden under which he was struggling. He was to go no further than to offer his misguided childhood in extenuation. Henriet later claimed that his master was in the habit of saying, 'It is my star which leads me to act as I

do.' His star, an invincible power — destiny! Certain authors pretend that he confessed having found the inspiration for his own debauchery in Suetonius' Lives of the Twelve Caesars. This question never arose during the course of the trial, and furthermore, Gilles stated decisively that 'I alone conceived the idea of these abject delights and these atrocious crimes. I killed for the pleasure of killing, for my own enjoyment, and without anyone's exhortation.'

He was conscious of his responsibility. He lived in fear — fear of the devil, fear of God and fear of man. Even while crying 'Come, Satan, come!' as Doctor Faust was later to exclaim, he never felt the least bit certain of himself; he hoped ardently, but at the same time trembled lest his will be done and Satan really appear. Faust was not to hesitate to sign a mortal pact, and in order to prolong his earthly life by a few years, he signed away his eternal life. But, a real or imagined character, Faust was to be of his own century — the 16th

— when men's hearts were weary of belief. Gilles was of his own, and he required the evil spirits to know, by the evocator's voice, that 'I reserve my life and my soul.'

Once the evocator insisted that he and his friend Sillé stand in the center of the magic circle with him; this circle was a protective boundary-line traced, while pronouncing the ritualistic words, with charcoal, holy-water or the wood of a consecrated cross. The devil could not enter it. Well! despite this assurance of protection, the thought of a *tête-à-tête* with the fallen angel was especially disagreeable to the two friends. Sillé grasped an image of the Virgin, clasped it in his arms and trembling, crouched near an open window.

Gilles, who was more concerned with the success of the experiment, penetrated the diabolic circle with the operator, making rapid and innumerable signs of the cross. 'Stop crossing yourself.' cried the necromancer, 'or else we are lost.' Gilles, not at all reassured by this admonition, intoned the *Alma Redemptoris,*

and the evocator chased him from the room — Gilles and Sillé jumped out of the window.

They did not go far. Pricked by curiosity, they remained with bated breath, their ears eagerly glued to the door. What they heard was well-calculated to augment their fright: the evocator was surely at grips with the devil, and was receiving a magnificent thrashing. The noise was comparable to the sound of ' a sword beating upon a metal basin,' and with the punishment administered, the devil left and Gilles timidly opening the door perceived the evocator stretched out on the floor, his head swollen and bloody. As there was no doubt that the wretch would go to hell if he died, Gilles hastily had him confessed. He was to recover. Here we have a glimpse of the brutal and yet mystical mentalities of certain characters of the contemporary Russian novel.

Gilles was not only afraid of the devil, as we have said, but he was also afraid of God. He knew remorse. The *Enquête sur la dilapidation*

shows him to have been harassed by the material consequences of his madness: 'Often he was pensive and melancholy, and it seems he was particularly so, after he sold his estates and no longer had the means to maintain his position.' Material ruin! For a believer like Gilles, the prospect of moral ruin and the ruin of his life in the hereafter, assumed much graver proportions. Frequently, stricken with terror, he swore to God and all the saints that he would reform; he vowed to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. During the Easter which preceded his arrest, he confessed to messire Olivier de Ferrières, and took communion in the chapel of Notre-Dame de la Trinité de Machecoul. Vain protestations! He repeatedly returned to his crimes, as the Evangel says and as he himself repeated, as a dog returns to its vomit, '*tanquam canis ad vomitum perseverans.*'

Britannicus' four admirable lines in Racine's play of the same name, aptly describe his particular hysterical relapses!

*Remorse shall assail you as the Furies of old;*
*New violence shall strengthen, not weaken*
*their hold;*
*Your fury, chastising itself more and more*
*Will stain every morning with newly-shed*
*gore!*

The most curious and fiery manifestation of these transitory and intermittent bursts of repentance was certainly the foundation of his famous collegiate. He instituted it that it might intercede in his favor before the All Merciful. He consecrated his entire fortune to its maintenance, and what is even more significant, he dedicated this chapel to the Holy Innocents; perhaps a concept unique in the history of religious foundation.[5] The Holy Innocents! These words shed a hallucinatory light upon the mind — one dare not understand — what innocents are meant? Those who expired under the sword of the evil king Herod, or rather the little victims Gilles

[5] A. Bourdeaut, *Chantocé et Gilles de Raiz*, p. 44.

sent to heaven? Have we not here a powerfully revealing indication of a conscience both absolutely overwhelmed by fear, and at the same time frantically gripped by its lust?

The majority of collegiate foundations were based on the anguish of tortured souls, desirous of obtaining divine commiseration. ' For the redemption of our sins, and the ransom of our souls,' their founders wrote. It may be taken for granted that their regrets were generally sincere and their contrition wholehearted. In the case of Gilles, with his troubled and obtuse soul, strange afterthoughts were intermingled with his repentance and regret: while he plunged into filth and gore, the angelic voices which were rising to God would, he felt, attenuate the spiritual consequences of his crimes. Some centuries later, during a notorious affair, accomplices were to be found playing music in the street, while inside the house, victims were being slaughtered. In the same way, Gilles trusted that the sound of holy-

chant would prevent the cries of the innocents from reaching Heaven.

He was not only tormented by the justice of God, but man's too refused to leave his mind in peace. He did not at all reject the shield of prudence in accomplishing his crimes. Thus, when he observed two children of either sex together, only one of whom pleased him, he made off with both, for fear that the one he disdained would tell about the capture of its little comrade. He respected the lives of his choir-boys, without respecting their virtue; they were trained to silence as well as vice; among others, one very 'darling' named Perrivet, who was particularly dear to his master.

He took great care to destroy the bodies of his victims, or to have them spirited away. During one particular trip to Vannes, where he stayed several days awaiting the payment of a debt contracted by the duke, a child was brought to him, in the house where he was lodging. . . . After the usual scene of debauch,

and after the murder, the child's head was burned and the trussed-up body was thrown into a neighbor's latrine. This was an extremely difficult operation — Poitou, lowered by a rope, descended into the filthy cesspool, in order to better 'sink' the corpse, and they had a great deal of trouble to get him out again. He was to relate the incident at the trial, saying 'Buchet who provided the child, knew all about the matter.'

When it was possible, the bleeding remains were burned upon great andirons, on which flaming logs were continually poked and fresh ones brought to replace them. The clothing met the same end; it was carefully lifted into the fire, so it might be consumed more readily and give off less odor. The ashes were then disposed of in secret hiding-places, in latrines or marshes.[6] . . .

[6] Confessions of Poitou, Henriet and Griart. Perrine, wife of Clément Rondeau, deposed having seen, at Machecoul, 'a powder said to be children's ashes, and a little child's shirt, which was all bloody and stank so badly that it made her very ill to smell it.' These effects

At first, the dark cellars of the castles served as oubliettes, but soon Gilles feared that even these sepulchres would end by giving up their dead. When he repurchased Chantocé from his brother, to turn it over to the duke of Brittany, he feared lest an indiscrete glance accidentally pierce the obscurity of these dismal places, so he charged four trustworthy people — his friend Gilles de Sillé, Henri Griart, Poitou, Hicquet de Brémont and a servant named Robin Romulart, to do away with the compromising remains of a great number of children which were hidden in the basements of a tower. These men took an oath never to reveal what they were about to see, and for nearly fifteen days they were busy with the performance of their unclean task. Poitou and Robin descended into the frightful charnel-house and crammed

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came from the house of a certain R. Colin, where Eustache Blanchet lived. This house, situated in a little-frequented street, had a particularly bad reputation, and was a house 'which was not fit for men of honor.' However, it was there that Prélati and Eustache Blanchet lived. (Civil inquiry.)

the bones into sacks, while Henriet and Brémont, who had remained above, hoisted them up by means of a long rope. Sillé kept watch.

A great quantity of these bones were burned and the ashes were hurled into the marshes, but there was not time enough to destroy them all. Thirty-five skulls and a certain number of skeletons were heaped into three chests, and a boat took them down the river to the outskirts of Nantes. There, piled upon a carriage, they took the road to Machecoul.[7]

Soon — a new alarm — René de la Suze and Lohëac marched upon that place. Gilles hastily ordered the remains to be burned, and Sillé and Romulart got to work. But Roger de Briqueville, intrigued by the coming and going of the two sinister workmen, insisted on knowing what was going on: in the company of the

[7] Did Chantocé's secret never leak out? Guil. Hilairet deposed that five years before, he learned from one Jean Dujardin, who lived with Roger de Briqueville, that ' a cask jammed full of dead little children ' had been found at Chantocé.

ladies de Jarville and de Thomin d'Aragouin, he looked in through a crack in the door.[8]

In December 1439 there was another alarm. Gilles was at Tiffauges. A great noise of horses resounded over the fields. The sentinel announced a countless multitude. It approached, and the herald who preceded it announced: Dauphin of France! It was, in effect, the future Louis XI, who had received a commission from his father to purge Poitou of the bandits who infested it. Gilles was terrified: alchemy and magic had been forbidden by Charles V. Should the young prince discover the furnaces and retorts, the Marshal of France would incur the

[8] But were these the corpses transported from Chantocé? Were these not the children who had been sacrificed at Machecoul itself? The number of skeletons alone, which had come from Chantocé, and those burned that day at Machecoul — about forty — leads us to voice this supposition. Moreover, M. Bourdeaut believes that there were two burnings at Machecoul. The first must have taken place at the news of the capture of Chantocé, and the second after this same Chantocé had been given over to Jean V, and that time it *was* the corpses which had been hidden there.

punishment foreseen. While he was hastening to appear before his illustrious and inconvenient guest, to offer his homage, he ordered his servants to destroy the compromising apparati. With the Dauphin gone, he wondered if these measures were sufficient: the Dauphin had visited the castle of Tiffauges and then the dungeon of Pouzauges — was it not possible that he himself was being aimed at! Was he not one of the bandits whom the prince had been ordered to discover and track down? To this question, he doubtless answered in the affirmative, for a short time after, he left Tiffauges in Poitou, on French territory, for Machecoul in Brittany, a safer haven.

These fears and this knowledge of the gravity of his crimes are certainly a proof that Gilles was responsible for his behavior. His awareness was real — however, this strange mixture of ardent piety and monstrous indulgence, of intermittent repentance and cold determination to continue in crime, of childish fear and military bravado, and his varied

inconsistency in the management of his personal affairs, all of this seems to demonstrate that his awareness was perhaps attenuated by an unknown taint, a heritage of which we know nothing.[9]

A sensational portrait — really that of a madman — has been painted of him: 'Occasionally his eyes became fixed and their pupils dilated with such force, lighting up with a sombre fire, that the eyeballs seemed to fill their sockets, which grew round and sank deeper into the head. Then his complexion took on lurid and cadaverous hues; his forehead, especially at the juncture of the nose, became ribbed with profound wrinkles, and his beard, which seemed to bristle, was blue rather than black.'[10]

Unfortunately, this caricature of Gilles de Raiz as Bluebeard was invented of whole cloth.

[9] We can affirm nothing in an absolute fashion, contrary to M. Fr. Bernelle's thesis in *La Psychose de Gilles de Raiz, sire de Laval, maréchal de France,* Paris, 1910.

[10] The Bibliophile Jacob, *Curiosités de l'Histoire de France,* 2nd series.

We possess no authentic portrait of the gentleman, and that which hangs in the Gallery at Versailles is of the last century. We know nothing of his face, his habitual gestures or his idiosyncrasies. Henriet's confession merely says that after scenes of lechery and murder, he lay exhausted on his bed and fell asleep. That proves nothing.

The *Mémoire des Héritiers,* drawn up, they say, at René de Raiz' instigation after his brother's death, tries to make him out a madman. Does the word insanity take on a medical connotation in this case? Any man who dissipates his fortune may be said to be 'insane' without the expression carrying the conviction of a specific derangement. A witness called before the inquisitors, on the matter of Gilles' ruinous expenditures, said more simply, 'Gilles was a prodigal and a wastrel of goods, and it seems to me that he didn't have good sense or understanding in doing what he did.' That seems to be a just approximation.

Was he a superior degenerate, as it has been

stated?[11] It is possible, although the term 'superior' scarcely jibes with what we know of his intelligence. Heavy shadows surround his tormented features, as in a portrait by Rembrandt. He appears to have been a paranoiac, a sexual pervert and a sadist whose sadism was cloaked in sanguinary forms well-known to the legal profession. Records of pain and death inflicted through desire are frequently to be found in the annals of the court. Still, Gilles carried his crimes to limits perhaps unknown up to then, and rarely surpassed since his time.

Finally, even if one takes into account his unmeasured pride and a naïveté of which he gave so many examples; even if one posits hereditary taint; even if one weighs in his so grievously misdirected childhood, and even if one offers his passion for alcohol and his natural violence, it is not possible to deny that Gilles de Raiz was still profoundly responsible for his actions.

[11] Doctor Marcel Baudouin, *Intermédiaire des chercheurs et curieux,* LII, 460.

The manner in which he knew how to die was to be proof that he possessed a conscience which was frightfully overcast, but was capable, however, of the most brilliant reawakening.

To conclude, one may wonder if the glorious halo of companion of Jeanne d'Arc, the luxurious spectacles of Orléans, the melodious choirs, his sadism, his cruelty, the mystery of the evocations, the candles and the incense — one may wonder if all that has not contributed to build an ultra-romantic legend about him, and if, stripped of these artifices, Gilles de Raiz would not appear a vulgar assassin, although an artist and a *grand seigneur.*

## VIII. Trial

FOR months and months, in fact, for years, horrible rumors had been circulating, which spread afar, even beyond the provinces. There was talk of the increasing disappearance of children. The belief that they were being sent to England to ransom Gilles de Sillé's brother, did not hold water very long. It was noticed that these disappearances took place chiefly in the vicinity of Gilles de Raiz' castles —Machecoul, Tiffauges, Chantocé and la Suze, or elsewhere, but always in the wake of his travels. They were reported from Vannes and la Roche-Bernard. The 'dolorous cry,' as the old documents have it, was voiced even in countries where he never set foot! One day a traveller arrived at a hotel in Saint-Jean-d'Angély. When asked where he came from, he said, 'From Machecoul.' At the mention

of that name, an expression of horror stamped the faces of his hearers. 'From Machecoul? But they say little children are eaten there!'

When, at the time of their quarrel with Gilles, René de la Suze and Lohéac laid siege to Machecoul, they observed two children's skeletons in a hole in one of the towers. The captain who accompanied them requested an explanation without, however, attaching much importance to the discovery. The matter rested, but not for very long.

Rumor now pointed openly to Gilles de Raiz; he was the wild beast who was devastating the home. The duke of Brittany could not overlook this defamatory public accusation, but he did nothing about it. Engrossed in his own affairs, might he not have been content to allow the culprit to sink further into his muck and blood? Gilles' ultimate downfall was to be due, not as might be imagined, to his having slipped in the blood he had spilled, but because he had seriously vexed the duke by an act of vulgar brigandage.

He had sold Guillaume Le Ferron, Jean V's treasurer, his estate at Saint-Étienne-de-Mer-Morte, but when the time came to surrender it, he changed his mind and kept it. Doubtless he hoped to obtain the necessary collateral by means of magic. There ensued a lawsuit, which he lost, and whose expenses he refused to defray. Guillaume Le Ferron had his property seized, and Gilles became violently angry. In 1440, on Pentecost day, he invaded the church of Saint-Étienne during high mass, dispersed the assemblage and brutally seized upon Jean Le Ferron, the treasurer's brother, who had been delegated by him to safeguard his interests. He threatened him with his 'jusarme.' 'Ha! ribald,' he shouted, 'you have beaten and robbed my men; come out of the church or I'll kill you on the spot!' Poor Le Ferron fell on his knees and replied that he would do Gilles' bidding. He was, nevertheless, badly treated, threatened with death and thrown into one of the prisons of the castle of Tiffauges.[1]

[1] Deposed by the marquis de Céva and Bertrand Poulein.

There was a great scandal — a dual scandal, in fact, both civil and religious. Jean Le Ferron was first of all a tonsured clerk, and also a Churchman; besides, the chapel of Saint-Étienne-de-Mer-Morte had been desecrated. Finally, the parish belonged to the duchy of Brittany, and by this act of banditry, Gilles had with one blow alienated both Jean V and the bishop of Nantes. The former instructed Richemont to rescue Le Ferron, and the constable laid siege to Tiffauges, captured it and freed the prisoner. As for Gilles, he entrenched himself at Machecoul.

The duke had him sentenced to pay a fine of 50,000 *livres*. How could he possibly have complied? His coffers were empty and could not have been replenished either by the ruinous loans he obtained, forced sales, or the Philosopher's Stone; so he decided to see the duke and have an understanding with him. He started on his way to Josselin, where Jean V had agreed to meet him.

The hour of expiation, however, was soon to

sound. Did the incident at Saint-Étienne-de-Mer-Morte embolden the bishop of Nantes to institute his inquiry? Was it a simple coincidence? No one knows. During the time Gilles was trying to pacify Jean V, Jean de Malestroit undertook a pastoral visit, as though by chance, through the parishes of Comté-Nantais which were adjacent to Machecoul. We are familiar with these pastoral visits of bishops and their archdeacons, even to this day. Witnesses appeared before them, who were known as 'synodic witnesses'; four were most frequently appointed — sometimes more — from among the notability, the most cultured villagers and men of best reputation. They instructed the bishop or his envoys concerning all that might possibly be of interest to the Church. At that final period of the Middle Ages, when the tradition of the bishop as protector of town and diocese had not been lost, the synodic witnesses asked their pastor, if such were the case, for aid and protection against the tyranny and

extortion of the great lords, of whom they were so frequently the victims.

Thus it was in the same spirit that those who appeared before Malestroit in the spring of 1440, re-echoed the abominable rumor. They cited the incessant disappearances of children, and did not hesitate to say that popular opinion ascribed them definitely to the sire de Raiz. Returned to Nantes, the bishop planned to sum up his information by a special inquest. Chancellor of Brittany, President of the Chamber of Accounts, and engrossed by innumerable tasks, he did not have the leisure to proceed alone in this inquiry; he stated as much in the letters by which he was to inaugurate the trial. So he employed the aid of various commissioners and delegates. The synodic witnesses were immediately called, and others also appeared. The inquest bore upon those parishes of the land of Raiz which the bishop had visited, and it was completed in the town of Nantes itself, in the parishes of Notre-Dame, Saint-Vincent, Saint-

Dénis, Sainte-Croix, Saint-Nicolas, Saint-Similien, Saint-Clément and Sainte-Marie, to which the house of la Suze belonged. From all sides, cases were cited of lost children and parents in despair.

These lamentations, or rather these denunciations, were collected by notaries in the Register of parochial visits itself, which the bishop confirmed, and we have no reason to doubt a statement which it would have been so easy to refute. This bishopric register has been lost, as all similar records of the 15th and the first half of the 16th centuries.

The inquest was then conducted and recorded with all possible care and all desirable scrupulousness. It already seemed sufficiently probatory to the bishop and so well informed and documented, that on the 30th of July he issued a letter finding Gilles de Raiz guilty of infamy. He gave the names of eight inhabitants of the town, men of the people, who complained of the disappearance of their children, and accused the Marshal with having stolen and

slaughtered them. He cited the depositions of the synodic witnesses, and those of other honorable people who were above all suspicion — '*aliis probis et discretis viris et personis non suspectis.*' He specified that these crimes had been committed in his own diocese, thus explaining his intervention.

This document was probably not made public, for fear of exciting Gilles' anger on the eve of the trial. Before attacking so formidable an individual, it would have been imprudent to put him on his guard. But if the document were kept secret, it was probably communicated to the duke of Brittany and the king. Could the bishop have reasonably accused one of the most powerful lords of the kingdom and the duchy, and a Marshal of France, of infamy, without having previously informed the duke and Charles VII himself?

The accusation was made public, we have seen, at the time Jean V was preoccupied with exacting vengeance for the affair of Saint-Étienne-de-Mer-Morte. At the very same time,

a certain Janvret, who had lost a child of nine, which frequented la Suze, succeeded in bringing his own 'dolorous cry' to the duke's ears. Jean V could no longer evade the matter. He requested the seneschal of Rennes, Pierre de l'Hospital, president of Brittany, to hold the inquest in his place and name, on the crimes of which his vassal was accused. The high rank and reputation of Pierre de l'Hospital guaranteed the impartiality with which the matter was to be conducted. This title of president of Brittany was bestowed upon the president of the judiciary committee, who was elected every year in the bosom of his States. He was to serve as supreme arbiter, charged with settling the most prickly questions, and those which had bearing upon the welfare of the duchy.

Pierre de l'Hospital's inquest recorded the complaints of fifteen people, seven of which had already figured in the episcopal proclamation of July the 30th. The conclusion was obvious and so evident to Jean V that he

hastened to confiscate Gilles' possessions, by an act dated at Plessis-de-Rézac-lès-Redon, on the ninth of September. A highly reprehensible act, which is understandable in the light of the duke's bitterness, but is nevertheless inexcusable.

This act has been seized upon to prove the invalidity of the trial itself, since it was instigated by motives of self-interest. This is farfetched. If deductions had to be drawn, it would have been much easier to show, to the contrary, that Jean V would not have dared to perpetrate such a confiscation, if he had not foreseen an assured conviction in view of the enormity of the charges and the proofs which had already been furnished. By the confiscation of the lands situated in Brittany he did no more than hasten the act of condemnation, which must inevitably have been pronounced upon the culprit.

However, at the moment of putting this confiscation into effect and ordering the arrest, he wavered. The affair seemed so freighted with

consequences! What would the king say — the king already so annoyed with him, the duke of Brittany, because he had been so deeply involved, some months before, with the Dauphin, the future Louis XI, and with La Trémoille and the duke d'Alençon as well as other lords, in that sedition known as *la Praguerie* by analogy with the Hussite uprising in Prague. Doubtless, the king having carried the day, had been generous in his pardon, but would he accept the arrest and condemnation of Gilles de Raiz with equal condescension? Even though he was swamped with debts, had fallen from grace and forfeited the former confidence of his sovereign, he was still Marshal of France.

Jean V confided his perplexity to his brother, Richemont. The constable was in a position to know the true feelings of the king, and he avowed himself a personal enemy of all sorcerers. According to his chronicler, Le Vavasseur, 'no man hated heretics and sorcerers more than he. . . . He more than any other of

his time, was responsible for their burning in Poitou and Brittany. And sorcerers and heretics might well have said, at his death, that their mortal enemy was dead.' Thus, Jean V could have done no better than appeal to Arthur De Richemont, and the latter did not vacillate a moment; he promised to uphold his brother, should it be necessary. To reward him, Jean V promised to relinquish the estates over which they had been disputing for thirty years. Then, strengthened by his support, he issued the warrant of arrest. Jean Labbé, the Breton captain, was sent to Machecoul at the head of an armed company.

What would Gilles do? Jean Labbé might have wondered. To tell the truth, little is known about the manner in which he gained entrance to the castle. He accomplished it easily, whether by ruse or surprise, or Gilles' order to raise the portcullis and lower the drawbridge. It has been said that Gilles thought it well to deliver himself of a joke: 'I always had the intention,' he is supposed to have said, 'of becoming a

monk; and behold! *l'abbé*, under whom I must enlist.' He pointed to Jean Labbé; an amusing idea, which remains uncorroborated by any authentic text.

Blanchet, Prélati and Poitou were arrested at the same time, and also Griart who, 'tempted by the devil,' intended to cut his throat in order to evade confessing the horrors he had witnessed. Roger de Briqueville and Gilles de Sillé, terror-stricken, had already decamped; and surrounded by archers, the five prisoners took the road to Nantes. Doubtless the inquisitors wanted to ascertain the attitude of the neighboring population at Machecoul and Nantes, and especially at Nantes, where the dual inquest had been so overwhelmingly damaging to Gilles. One can only imagine the cries of malediction and the threatening gestures.

The bishop's inquiry, as we have said, arrived simultaneously at the same formal conclusions as the civil inquest, but being endowed with no power of constraint, the bishop could

not proceed to the arrest. When it had become an accomplished fact, and Gilles was confined in the ducal mansion, on September 13th the bishop sent him a citation to appear before his tribunal, by his notary, Robin Guillaumet, who was acting as bailiff. This document, addressed to curates, chaplains, clerks, notaries public and all qualified persons, according to the banal formula of all documents of a like nature, first cited the conclusions reached by the inquiries instituted by the bishop or his commissioners, and the complaints and accusations which he had already mentioned in his letters of July the 30th.

Then the bishop reached the crux of the matter: 'It is certain,' he said, 'that the nobleman lord Gilles de Raiz, baron of the said lands, in the diocese of Nantes, caused to perish several innocent victims; that he committed upon them the sin of sodomy; that he several times invoked devils; that he signed pacts with them, made them sacrifices; that he has rendered himself guilty of heresy, of offense to

divine majesty, of perturbation of the faith, and scandal in many respects. . . .

'Not wishing to further tolerate such aberrations and a like disease of heresy, which spreads like a cancer, *qui velut cancer serpit,* if it is not immediately extirpated, we enjoin you to summon the said baron before us or before the official of our cathedral, on the Monday after the celebration of the Exaltation of the True Cross, and we summon him ourselves, to our bar, as our justiciable.'

Gilles had received a suitable apartment in the New Tower of the castle, and it was there that he was notified of the convocation. His accomplices had, without further formality, been thrown into the dungeons of the same ducal castle, whence they were withdrawn in accordance with the requirements of the double procedure, and then immediately returned to their abode. This was a simple matter for the sessions of the religious tribunal, for it sat in one of the great halls of the New Tower. But the duke's tribune was installed some hun-

dreds of meters off, at Bouffay, beside the Loire, and in order to present themselves, the accused were required to travel through centrally located streets, in the midst of the hooting of the agitated throngs.

The composition of the religious tribunal demonstrates what importance the affair about to transpire assumed in the eyes of the bishop. A more distinguished body of important individuals could not have been selected. President, Jean de Malestroit; judge, brother Jean Blouyn, of the Preaching Brothers of Nantes, vice-inquisitor of the diocese; promoter, or as we say today, prosecuting attorney, Guillaume Chapeillon, curate of Saint-Nicolas de Nantes; chief assessors, Guillaume de Malestroit, bishop of Mans; Jean Prigent, bishop of Saint-Brieuc; Dénis de Lohérie, bishop of Laodicea (?); Jacques de Penticoëdic, an official of the Church of Nantes; Robin Guillaumet, notary-public, acting as bailiff; four other notaries performing the office of registrars, and finally Pierre de l'Hospital.

The same Pierre de l'Hospital presided over the ducal Tribunal. Among his assessors, he had one Guillaume Grimaud, an attorney of the lay court. We do not know the others. All these persons who had been called upon to judge so illustrious a lord, were men of repute in the province. The consideration of the accusation of demonic practice, which constituted heresy, was reserved for the ecclesiastic judges, together with the accusations of crimes against nature and violation of ecclesiastical immunity: armed invasion of the church of Saint-Étienne-de-Mer-Morte, in order to seize a man of the Church. The lay judges were charged with pronouncing upon the murders of children, and this same expedition to Saint-Étienne-de-Mer-Morte, in its aspect as a revolt against the duke. Theoretically, the accusations were precisely divided and classified; but in reality, they impinged upon one another.

Just as the two preliminary hearings took place at the same time, so the two trials followed their parallel courses simultaneously.

The dual report of these two trials must then have gone hand in hand, just as its judges.

On the 18th of September the secular tribunal commenced the audition of witnesses. We have already given the gist of these sensational depositions, in speaking of the little victims. A woeful procession of poor people came to relate the disappearances of their children, and the artifices which had lured them into the traps spread before them. There were eighty testimonials, all incriminating; what contradictions in detail cropped up, do not at all invalidate the weight of an overwhelming unanimity. The fact that the father of the Daret child said it was nine years old, and its grandmother said it was seven or eight — or that the Roucin and Jeudon children disappeared in 1431 according to some, or the year after according to others, is of absolutely no importance.

The ecclesiastic judges certainly felt no doubt about the guilt of the accused, but they seemed at first to take unusual pains in han-

dling his impetuous character; they employed strategic measures, which, in juristic practice, is of questionable honesty. The act of accusation bore only the implication of heresy; it omitted the crimes against nature. When this act was read to Gilles, he readily declared, 'I recognize the bishop of Nantes as my judge,' and he added, 'I shall have no difficulty in clearing myself of this accusation.' As a matter of fact, he did not know that the practice of magic constituted heresy, and consequently he believed he could easily get out of it.

He had acknowledged the bishop's tribunal — that was what his judges had desired. Then they presented the brief but formal recitation of the crimes of which he was accused; frightful crimes, whose proof would inevitably lead him to his death. Overwhelmed, Gilles protested that he no longer recognized the said tribunal. 'I appeal,' he declared. 'Your appeal is invalid,' they answered, 'since it is not in writing.' Gilles grew angry; his inherent violence, his natural pride and the vision of the

fearful retribution whipped him into a frenzy. He refused to take the required oath, and that despite the threat of excommunication. The audience breathlessly witnessed this dramatic scene.

On the 13th of October there was another session, and further denials from Gilles. The entire act of accusation was read aloud in court: forty-nine articles, any one of which would suffice to send a man to the stake. The judges begged Gilles to defend himself, but he contented himself with still protesting against the jurisdiction of the bishop, saying, 'I lodged an appeal.' An appeal to whom? He did not specify. Only the pope could have received an appeal of that nature, if it had been in writing; but this appeal had no more been written than the previous ones. The tribunal once more decided to proceed.

Gilles utterly beside himself with rage, delivered himself of a curious statement. He turned to his judges and cried, 'Simoniacs, ribalds, *you* my judges! Rather than be an-

swerable to such ecclesiastics and such judges, I would prefer to be hung by the neck!' They tried to calm him; they translated several articles of the accusation into French for him, in order to better enlighten his conscience. But Gilles, still beside himself, spoke directly to Jean de Malestroit, saying, 'I will do nothing for the bishop of Nantes.'

The judges did not lose their patience. Upon the request of the prosecutor, the bishop and brother Jean Blouyn continued to ask him certain questions, and begged him to answer verbally or in writing. Gilles snapped, 'I will not answer these accusations in any way.'

For the second time the judges threatened him with excommunication if he persisted in his unavailing silence. He replied in an ambiguous fashion: 'If I had committed the crimes charged against me, I should have violated the Catholic faith; I cannot doubt that, and I do not doubt it.' Turning to the chancellor of Brittany, he added, 'I do not pretend to benefit by any ecclesiastic privilege, and I am aston-

ished that you, Pierre de l'Hospital, allow ecclesiastic judges to decide upon the crimes charged against me, and accuse me of such frightful things.'

What was Gilles' intention in thus appealing to the president of the ducal tribunal, and trying by every means to escape the grip of the canonical tribune? Did his pride as Marshal of France and powerful baron revolt against his appearance before a bishop, and especially before a simple monk? Did he hope that the civil judges would be more conciliatory — who could, after all, have sent him to his death? But death, a transitory event, terrified his Christian spirit much less than excommunication, which would mean eternal death.

The bishop and the prosecutor vainly continued to insist upon his speaking. Upon his reïterated refusal, the judges pronounced him manifestly in contempt of court. They publicly read the sentence of excommunication, and decided to pass it over his protest.

Once more Gilles orally appealed this sen-

tence, and both Jean de Malestroit and brother Jean Blouyn rejected his appeal 'as frivolous.' Then, that no shadow of doubt might remain before the public concerning the authority of the judges, and that authority which Gilles insisted on denying, they commanded a reading of the letters-patent of Guillaume Mérici, of the Order of Preaching Brothers, grand inquisitor of France, naming Jean Blouyn his vice-inquisitor and charging him to judge in his stead, 'all people arrested for heresy.'

'You have nothing to add?' the accused was asked. 'No,' he replied, drily. The judges had the grand inquisitor's letters passed about among the principal people present, that they might verify their authenticity by the seals. Gilles was then returned to his prison.

These events took place on the 13th; on the 15th, there was a sudden unexpected change. Called once more before the ecclesiastic bar, the accused appeared to have been transformed. He who had been so disdainful, scornful and

GILLES DE RAIZ' CHAPEL
At Tiffauges, Poitiou.

SEALS OF THE INQUISITORIAL LAWYERS

These four men figured prominently in the trial of Gilles de Raiz. From the Archives of the Loire-Inferieure.

refractory, seemed completely metamorphosed. To the preliminary question, 'Do you recognize us as your rightful judges?' he replied that he acknowledged the bishop of Nantes and brother Blouyn, Guillaume Mérici's delegate, as his legitimate judges. What could have happened? What secret voice had harnessed and calmed the torrents of this tempestuous soul? Had Gilles realized that he had taken the wrong tack by revolting against the ecclesiastic tribunal? Did he know that, two days before, his lay judges had decided to submit him to torture? That decision was not to be 'declared,' that is to say, made public, until the 19th, but the news of it might have filtered through his prison-walls. Or, had his conscience simply been reborn? It would be difficult to solve this psychological question, but whatever its causes, his conversion was extraordinary and surprising.

He burst into tears and said he regretted the outrages and injuries of which he had rendered himself guilty in his judges' eyes; he begged

their humble pardon, and the bishop and Jean Blouyn announced that they would forget his offensive behavior.

'Now,' said the prosecutor, 'do you consent that we pass to the examination of the act of accusation?' 'Yes,' Gilles replied, 'and I swear to tell the truth.' This oath, which had cost him so much on the preceding days, had finally been taken. Jean Prigent, bishop of Saint-Brieuc, revealed to him in Latin, and then in French, all the main accusations, and Gilles recognized that he was really answerable to Jean de Malestroit, since the latter was truly, and for twenty-seven years had been, bishop of Nantes, and that Saint-Étienne-de-Mer-Morte and Machecoul were well within the limits of his diocese; besides, he himself had been baptized and renounced the devil.

If, pressed by secret reasons, he thus submitted to ecclesiastic justice, it did not mean that he was ready to enter upon the steep and thorny path of confession; he still hoped to be able to escape that shame, and the punishment

entailed. 'Nothing is falser,' he proclaimed, 'than these accusations of diabolic evocation and sacrifice. It is true that I once received a book which treated of alchemy and demonology, from a soldier confined in the prisons of Angers; I read it, but I gave it back to him several days later, and I was content with that. Besides, in that respect, you may call all the witnesses you wish; I am quite content, and I shall abide by their testimony.' The prosecutor said, 'Let us both take an oath upon the Holy Evangels to tell the truth,' and the two adversaries extended their hands.

They had bound themselves before God.

## IX. Condemnation

'I SHALL abide by the testimony of the witnesses,' Gilles de Raiz had said. He did not imagine that those witnesses, Prélati, Eustache Blanchet, Étienne Corillaut, called Poitou, Henriet Griart and others whose depositions we do not possess, as Théophanie, the widow Branchu, and la Meffraie, who died in prison — he did not imagine that these witnesses and accomplices would go so far as to condemn themselves, by condemning him through indiscreet confession.

Perhaps by giving these workmen who constructed the horrible tower of black magic, sodomy and child-massacre of which their master was the great architect, the illusion that they were witnesses, the inquisitors only wished to encourage them to speak more openly. One by one they took their oath upon the Evangel, and bound themselves to tell the truth.

Gilles was asked, 'Would you like to question them yourself? If you would, we will give you all of tomorrow in which to reflect upon what you would like to say to them.' Gilles replied, 'I will abide entirely by their conscience.'

But while they were being taken away, something really strange and unexpected took place. Gilles fell to his knees; with heavy sighs, and in mournful anguish and contrition (*genibus flexis, cum magnis suspiriis, contrictione et flectu doloroso*), he begged the bishop of Nantes and the vice-inquisitor to raise the sentence of excommunication which had been laid upon him, and to do it in writing. He feared that were it lifted verbally alone, the excommunication would still bar him from reentering the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church. This torment of a mystical nature, occurring at so serious a moment in his temporal life, clearly displays the nature of the struggle that was taking place in his soul. Jean de Malestroit hastened to assent to his desire, inflicted a penance proportionate to his offense,

and signed the commutation of sentence to the spiritual death which excommunication assures its victim. Gilles was led back to his prison, reassured upon that essential point.

The next day, the 16th, the cross-examination of witnesses took place before the three bailiffs, Delaunay, Lesné and Petit. Prélati was called first. He stated his name, origin and quality: François Prélati, born at Montcatino in the vale of Nievoli, diocese of Pistoia; a tonsured priest, formerly student of poetry, geomancy and various other arts and sciences. He related how he had been put into touch with Gilles through Eustache Blanchet. He told of the scenes of evocation during which, in the fumes of odoriferous plants, he had supplicated the spirits to show themselves.

Touching the murders, his testimony was extremely prudent; he had *heard tell* through Guillaume Daussy, one of Gilles' intimates that the latter had defiled, killed and caused to be killed, a great number of children in his rooms at Tiffauges and Machecoul, and in a

room over the gateway of this same castle of Machecoul, and had offered the devil the blood and limbs of victims, as an inducement to appear. Undoubtedly grilled and pressed by the judges (unfortunately we possess merely a dry and lifeless resumé of these depositions, in which there is nothing of the vigorous pace which such sessions ought to have), Prélati stated that he remembered having himself seen, at Tiffauges, about a year before, the body of a six-months-old child which, *he believed,* had been killed by Sillé. He confessed having told Gilles, who was complaining of the spirits' obstinate refusal to appear, that instead of cocks and turtle-doves, he ought to offer them the limbs of little children; and his master had immediately obeyed. He admitted having made the devil appear ten or twelve times. Concerning these apparitions, he offered the circumstantial evidence cited above; the handsome young man, the talisman of dust, the golden nuggets, the serpent, Gilles' fright and the relic of the Holy Cross.

His personal opinion concerning Baron's refusal to appear to Gilles was categorical: Baron had exacted of Gilles a promise to feed three paupers during three important festivals. Gilles had kept his word on the previous All Saints' Day, but had neglected the other festivals. Hence Baron's anger.

Prélati had spoken. He had not compromised himself in the least, and he had not brought forward anything very serious concerning himself. He had heard tell . . . someone had told him. . . . If he had borne witness to the offerings of children's limbs to the evil spirits, he had not begun by incriminating himself in the murder of the said children. It was a clever deposition. The astute Italian had affirmed the reality of his apparitions; he had demonstrated his power; he hoped to first impress his judges, and subsequently, public opinion. He succeeded in a way — he was to have been sentenced to life-imprisonment, but the duke of Anjou helped him escape it, being tempted to have a man gifted with such stupe-

fying power at his court. He was later to be found as captain of la Roche-sur-Yon, where his immoderate good luck was to end.

One day Geoffroy Le Ferron, the treasurer of Brittany, whom he accused of having had him sentenced to take revenge for the affair of Saint-Étienne-de-Mer-Morte, passed through the town. Prélati gave orders to have him seized and thrown in jail. But for that act, Prélati was arrested in his turn. Always feared and crafty, he succeeded in benefiting by his letters of pardon, but it was a brief respite, for the King's Great Council, turning up its nose at the Italian's reputation, finally sent him to a rendezvous with Baron — elsewhere than on this earth.

Eustache Blanchet testified the next day, October 17th. His birthplace — the parish of Saint-Éloi de Montauban, in the diocese of Saint-Malo. His age, about forty. His quality — a priest. He first related, and at great length, his meeting with Prélati in Florence, and the arrival of the magician at Tiffauges. Prélati

lodged with a certain Jean, a Parisian jeweler, and an old woman by the name of Perrotte, in a house quite near the church of Saint-Nicolas. Every day Gilles de Raiz came to work with Prélati and the Parisian jeweler. He came, sometimes at night, sometimes by day and sometimes at cock-crow. When he came, he, Blanchet and the woman Perrotte, left the room. But one night, from an adjoining room, he clearly heard Prélati saying, 'Come, Satan, come!'[1] Then he felt a great cold wind pass through the house, and he was terrified.

He left Gilles and went to live at Mortagne in Poitou. Gilles wrote him several times, begging him to return, but he refused. One day a certain Jean Méric, squire of Rochet-sur-Oyon, in the diocese of Luçon, passed through Mortagne, and Blanchet asked him the news of Nantes and Clisson. Méric spoke of the rumors that were afloat: they said that Gilles

[1] Here the French is '*Satan, viens, ou venez!*' which does not admit of translation.

had many children killed, and wrote books of black magic with their blood. So the next day, when the jeweler Jean Petit appeared in Gilles' behalf to ask him to return to Tiffauges, Blanchet refused vehemently. As for Jean Petits, who had been so unlucky in his mission, he was confined at Saint-Étienne-de-Mer-Morte. Then Gilles sent several of his allies to Mortagne — Poitou, Sillé, Jean le Breton, and Henriet Griart, who seized Blanchet and brought him back to Machecoul.

There, Blanchet heard tell of various disappearances of children; that of the son of Georges le Barbier, and those of the pages of Saussay and Prélati. Gilles having shown him some sheafs written by him in red ink, on which there were crosses and signs in purple, he believed that it was blood — the blood of immolated children.

He related having brought to Gilles, not only Prélati, but still another magician, named Jean de la Rivière. It was this Jean de la Rivière who one night, at Pouzauges, engaged the

leopard-devil with his broadsword. He spoke of the Angers charlatan, who had received the silver *marc* and got drunk on it. He retold the adventure of Prélati's maltreatment by an ill-humored devil: the noise of the blows was like that of a stick beating a bed-cover. Finally, like the Italian, he reported Gilles' remorse, and his frequently expressed desire to reform and leave for the Holy Lands.

Here was a confession as discreet as Prélati's; Blanchet took great care to belittle his own activities. He went to sufficient lengths concerning his flight to Mortagne, he hoped, to at least ingratiate himself with the tribunal. He was to succeed in being sentenced to only 300 francs fine, and life-banishment.

With Poitou and Henriet, who were simpler-minded men, the testimony left the field of the vague and indecisive. The two accomplices appeared on the same day, October 17th, Poitou first. Étienne Corillaut, called Poitou, from Pouzauges in the diocese of Luçon, about twenty-two years old, 'servant and chamber-

lain' of Gilles de Raiz. He had *heard tell* through the lord Charles de Léon, after the capture of the fortress of Machecoul, that the bones of two children had been found in a low tower. This was not a particularly compromising admission. The judges pressed him, and he related the removal of the bodies from Chantocé. There were thirty-six or forty-six skeletons, he did not quite remember. The painful confessions had been touched upon; he continued; he confessed, just as Sillé, Henriet and Rossignol, having brought about forty-three boys and girls to Gilles' rooms.

He furnished complete details of the lechery and murders. With his own eyes he had seen the killing of the brother of a woman named Catherine Thierry; she had brought the child to Gilles to be a page. He spoke of the victims already recorded by the inquiry, which constituted confirmation of those facts; for instance, of the handsome adolescent boy of fifteen, who had come from Brittany to Bourgneuf, in order to learn French. He mentioned

the child brought to Machecoul from la Roche-Bernard; Prélati's page; the page procured for Gilles by Pierre Jacquet, called Prinçay, and the one provided by André Buchet, who had been brought from the suburbs of Vannes. All of them, after having served the master's lust, were massacred by him. Gilles did not spare Poitou himself, or the children of his chapel.

Concerning the sacrifices to the devil, Poitou distinctly remembered having seen, at Tiffauges, the hand and heart of a child, in a glass on the mantel of the fire-place. Gilles had it wrapped in a cloth, and ordered Henriet to close the door. He had seen the magic circles, the incense, the magnetic stone, the torches, earthen pots and mysterious coats-of-arms on the walls of the room. One day he had assisted at an impressive scene: Gilles and François Prélati had locked themselves in the evocation chamber. He, Poitou, and Henriet, heard Prélati speaking in a loud voice, but they could not catch the sense of the words; then they heard a noise like that of a four-footed animal,

clambering about the house and trying to enter by the window.

The next day, Gilles and Prélati took him to a nocturnal evocation in the fields. He and the Italian were entrusted with carrying the fire, charcoal, magnetic stone and other necessary implements. Prélati called Baron to his aid, and despite his admonition, Poitou crossed himself several times, and the devil disdained to appear, doubtless because of those untoward signs of the cross.

So much for Poitou. Griart's confession was no less edifying, and it corroborated Poitou's in a thorough-going fashion. The witness stated his titles and rank: Henriet Griart, of the parish of Saint-Jacques de la Boucherie, of Paris, about twenty-six years old, and Gilles de Raiz' chamberlain for the past five or six years.

He admitted having participated, with Poitou, Sillé, Hicquet de Brémont and Robin Romulart, in the packing and removal of the Chantocé skeletons. He had counted the heads, and he too no longer remembered whether there

had been thirty-six or forty-six. He avowed having furnished his master with several children of both sexes; after having been polluted, they were slaughtered by Gilles, Sillé, Poitou or himself. Sometimes the four of them combined in the massacre. Blood flowed upon the floor, but the place was immediately cleaned up.

He corroborated Poitou's information concerning the burning of the bodies and effects, the number of the victims, the more violent delights Gilles experienced as executioner than mere sadist, his relations with his chapel-boys and the satanic evocations.

On October 19th, Poitou and Griart testified again, this time before the ducal tribunal, and furnished complementary details. Poitou declared that the number of the Machecoul victims tallied up to eighty, and the victims executed at la Suze, eleven or twelve. The two wretches had nothing further to conceal, and they knew the fate that was awaiting them. Prélati and Blanchet, who were churchmen, testified only before the ecclesiastic tribune.

What a terrible blow these depositions were to be to Gilles! We have already seen his pride tottering, terrified by the excommunication, and perhaps secretly informed that the lay judges had resolved to employ torture to exact a confession from him. He was notified of this threat of torture on the same day — October the 19th — and was led before the rack. At the sight of the frightful instrument he experienced a new shock, lost his composure and requested a stay until the morrow. Perhaps by then, something or someone would intervene to save him. The stay he requested was granted.

The next morning, October 20th, he was again brought before the ecclesiastic tribunal. The bishop of Nantes and the vice-inquisitor begged him to speak and defend himself. 'I have nothing to say,' he answered, 'I stand by what I previously declared.' 'Then you consent that the depositions of the witnesses be made public?' 'I consent,' he said, and the depositions were made public. Gilles had relied upon the statements of Prélati, Blanchet, Poitou

and Griart. . . . He was overwhelmed. Did he not violently protest against this impetuous flood of accusation which threatened to ruin him?

No — he remained silent. Just as the secular judges, the ecclesiastic judges decided to put him to the question, and that was the very day the stay granted by the secular arm had expired. The hour of the ordeal had sounded. Upon the retirement of the ecclesiastic tribunal, he was conducted to the ' high and vast hall of Nantes,' where the ' gehenna ' had been prepared. In order to accord him complete moral liberty, he was placed far from the instrument of torture, and did not see it.

What confusion reigned in his mind! After the crushing depositions of his accomplices, whom could he count upon? Today or tomorrow he would be forced to give his assent to the humiliating confessions. What good would it do to submit to useless preliminary torture? What good would it do? It was all over; he was conquered; he capitulated. Fear of tor-

ture assuredly impelled his first confession, but Gilles might have been content with saying just enough to escape torture. He was to tell all — everything; his natural sincerity would now tolerate no further obstacle or limitation.

'Frankly and freely' he confessed his debauched and bloody life. What he confessed was exactly what Griart, Poitou, Prélati and Blanchet had related, and what the civil and religious inquiries had so decisively demonstrated. He told of his sadistic cruelty and his bestial indulgence; he told of the children who had been hung up, their terror, the cutting of the cord, their joyful faces and then their horror when the fatal cord was again tightened about their necks. He told of the contest of severed heads, and the cremated bodies. He even confessed two murders which no witness up to then had mentioned. He named as his accomplices, Gilles de Sillé, Roger de Briqueville, Henriet Poitou, Rossignol and the said Robin.

He spoke exhaustively about the diabolic

evocations. He related how he had entered into relations with Prélati, who claimed to have 'found a method of making a spirit appear to him by conjuration,' — said spirit being named Baron. He assisted at many evocations, but had never been able to see the devil, 'because of which he was extremely angry.' He spoke of the pact signed with his blood. One day Prélati had told him that the devil, 'among other things, demanded a gift of a certain number of children.' Shortly thereafter, he 'gave him a hand and a heart and the eyes of a little child.'

He reported all the unlikely stories with which Prélati and others had taken delight to mystify him. He especially recalled the ornament 'made of silver' that Prélati had sent him at Bourges, with the instruction that he faithfully carry it about his person. Gilles had kept it several days and finally threw it away, 'because he could not see that it did him any good.' He related all the idle chatter in which he had believed: one day it was an old woman who declared that he would not succeed with

the devil as long as he remained attached to his chapel; another time, it was an evocator who had come from 'up-country,' and who, scarcely arrived, proceeded to die — certainly as a punishment from God, Gilles believed.

The confession was over; the judges might have pronounced their sentence, but they decided, however, to take a respite either because they insisted on giving precedence to the ecclesiastic tribunal, or they wished to first wind up the cases of Poitou and Griart. In fact, the two wretches were sentenced within the next few days, to be hung and burned.

Gilles was brought back before the ecclesiastic tribune and, a strange thing, he who had made this atrocious confession before the ducal tribunal, hesitated to restate it before the religious judges, and thus escape torture for the second time. One explanation alone seems plausible: he recoiled, intimidated and stirred by the majesty of this imposing areopagus of bishops, priests and monks. This conclave seemed much more imposing to him

than that of the civil judges: it represented God.

Then he was taken to the castle's lower hall, where the instrument of torture had been prepared. But there he found that fear was stronger than shame, and he changed his mind. He humbly begged the bishop of Nantes and the inquisitor's delegate, just as he had begged the secular judges, to grant him a respite of twenty-four hours. He swore that until then, he would speak *in camera,* before the bishop of Saint-Brieuc and the president of Brittany alone, who had already heard his confession. He imagined that the tribunal would be satisfied with this extra-judicial confession. The Court granted the delay requested, but only until two o'clock that afternoon, and it authorized the two members in question to receive Gilles de Raiz' confession.

He was led back to his prison, where the bishop of Saint-Brieuc and the president of Brittany joined him at two o'clock, accompanied by their bailiffs and notaries: Jean

Labbé, Yves de Roscerff, a squire, Jean Toucheronde, a clerk, and Jean Parvus. Courteously and calmly, he answered all the questions put to him. He restated before them all, what he had previously declared before the secular judges, and he asserted that he had committed all these abominations on his own initiative.

Vainly, Pierre de l'Hospital, who was greatly astonished by it all, urged him to tell the truth; he insisted that he had confessed everything: 'Alas! monseigneur,' he cried, 'you torment yourself and me also.' 'I do not torment myself,' the bishop replied, 'but I am greatly astonished at what you have told me, and cannot be entirely content with it. Thus, I desire and wish to know from you the pure truth, for reasons I have so often told you.' 'Truly, there was no reason, end or intent other than what I have told you; I have told you worse things than the truth itself, and enough to send ten thousand men to death.' [2]

[2] The lines just quoted are in French in the Latin text.

The president ordered Prélati to be brought in. It was a profoundly moving encounter. It is probable that the Italian had already appeared before the ecclesiastic tribune, as defendant, since the bishop of Saint-Brieuc declared that he had confessed having offered the blood and limbs of a little child to the evil spirits. We no longer possess the verbal process of that session, but merely the succinct record of his meeting with Gilles. The president cross-examined the two accomplices by turns, upon the demonic evocations and the presentation of martyred bodies to the devil. Just as they had acted together in the commission of these crimes, they now were in agreement in confessing them. Then the president, amply informed, ordered Prélati to be taken from the chamber.

At that moment a pathetic incident took place, which was well calculated to convince the judges, if they were not already, of Gilles' sincerity in his new attitude. At first he had struggled, conscious of the dual pain of death

he had incurred: pain of spiritual death, which wounds the immortal soul forever, and pain of temporal death which awaits the corruptible body. Stricken with excommunication as a result of his revolt against the ecclesiastic tribune, he had obtained its removal, and he could not doubt that were he again condemned to the same punishment for his crimes, the tribunal would not reverse its judgment and once more lift its sentence. Doubtless he also feared temporal death; he had tried to escape it by his silence and denials, but now that he knew it to be inevitable, now that it was close upon him and eternity was casting its first disquieting beams upon him, he allowed his real faith to burst forth. He recalled Christ's promise to the good thief: '*Hodie mecum in paradiso.*' Filled with this sacred memory, he turned to his faithful and so frequently evil counsellor, and bursting into tears, *cum lacrimis et singultu,* he pronounced these touching words, which the registrar entered in French, 'Adieu, François, my friend! Never again shall we see

each other in this world. I pray that God give you good patience and understanding, and be assured that if you only have good patience and hope in God, we shall see each other again in the great joy of Paradise. Pray God for me, and I shall pray for you.'

So saying, he repeatedly embraced Prélati. If these words had not followed the confessions, they might be taken as a disguised protestation of innocence. Gilles had stated his sins; he knew the immensity of divine mercy, and had confidence that his confession and the expiation of his crimes in the name of human justice would spare him eternal punishment.

He walked the way of salvation ever freer and freer of the chains of pride and vainglory. He was a different man: Paul upon the road to Damascus! He no longer recoiled from a public confession, and he made it as the early Christians had, filled with a profound humility. Formerly, fugitive remorse had made him dream of going to Jerusalem; but he was to

accomplish a pilgrimage, not to the tomb of Christ, but to His own heaven.

On the 22nd of October, the ecclesiastic tribune was assembled in its entirety. A great crowd packed the room; it knew the previous confessions by hearsay, but it was eager to hear them from the very mouth of the culprit. And Gilles spoke. It was a confession strictly identical to those confirmed before the ducal tribune, and then before the president of Brittany and the bishop of Saint-Brieuc, some hours before. It included new details of a psychological order, which confirmed the transformation which had been fermenting in the criminal's soul. Gilles declared that he was speaking freely and in all the anguish of his repentant heart — '*cum magnaque cordis contrictione et amaritudine.*' A flood of tears bathed his face.

Evil habits had vitiated his childhood and he had sinned against God from his earliest youth; then he had given a free reign to all his passions. He did not dare to offer an excuse,

and, turning to the breathless audience, he cried, 'Oh! you who have children, guide them, in their childhood and their youth, into the path of good counsel and virtue.' That his repentance might serve as an example, since the majority of the audience was ignorant of Latin, the language in which the sittings were conducted, he asked that it be translated into the vulgar tongue. He felt that by this voluntary heightening of his shame, he would more readily deserve divine mercy. Had not that mercy already been manifested towards him? How else could one explain, he added, that in the midst of his iniquities, the devil had not strangled his soul and carried it off to his dark domains?

For the second time, he addressed the listening parents: 'Ah! guard your children from luxurious indulgence in attire and soft life. The majority of our evils proceed from sloth and the lust for luxury. It was in that sloth — it was in that abuse of dainty food and heady wine, that I found the incentive for so many

sins and crimes. I ask pardon of the Creator and the Very Holy Redeemer; I ask pardon of you too, parents and friends of the children who were my unfortunate victims; I ask pardon of all Christians, present and absent. Humbly, and in tears, I beg them to grant me the succor of their prayers.'

On the 25th, Gilles was once more hailed before the ecclesiastic Court. It was a solemn session, if there ever was one. There were present, besides the judges and the public present on the 23rd, doctors of law or theology, men renowned for their knowledge and their wisdom.[3] The judges, who had arrived at a decision, were still insistent upon questioning these renowned and learned men, these bishops, doctors of law and professors expert in sacred

[3] Jean Prigent, bishop of Saint-Brieuc; master Pierre de l'Hospital, president of Brittany; Robert d'Espinaz, knight; nobleman Yves de Roscerff; Yves Coyer, dean; Jean Morel, lay-clerk; Gracien Reuitz; Guillaume Groyguet, bachelor of canonical and civil law; Jean de Château-Giron, Pierre Avril, Robert Viguier and God. de Chevigné, bachelors of law and mayors of Nantes (majoribus nannetensibus); God. Pipier, dean; Pierre

texts. Gilles' position was too important, and the accusations too monstrous for them not to feel obliged to take the greatest precautions, in the eyes of their contemporaries, and the future.

Jean de Malestroit and brother Jean Blouyn caused a faithful record of the trial to be read before them; then they begged them to give their opinions — separately and in writing. Jacques de Pentcoëdic, official of the Church of Nantes, read the notes made by these celebrities, in a loud voice. Then, confirmed in their conviction, and reïnforced in their authority, the judges pronounced the fearful sentence. It was clothed in the most solemn terms:

'Christ's name invoked, we, Jean, bishop of Nantes, and brother Jean Blouyn, bachelor of Holy Scripture, of the order of the Preaching Brothers of Nantes, vicar of the Inquisition for the town and diocese of Nantes, sitting in con-

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Hamon, Jean Guérin, Jean Vaede and Jean Pimon, canons of the churches of Notre-Dame de Nantes and Saint-Brieuc; Hervé Lévy, seneschal of Quimper; master Guillaume de la Loherié, bachelor of law, and lawyer of the secular court of Nantes, etc.

clave, and having God alone in mind, after having taken the counsel and advice of our lord bishops, priests, doctors and masters of Holy Scripture, after having heard the depositions of the witnesses called in our name and in the name of our prosecutor, especially deputized by us for this proceeding, against you, Gilles de Raiz, our justiciable; after having had their depositions faithfully reduced to writing, after having heard your own confession, made spontaneously before us, after having ripely weighed and considered the other reasons which have rightly acted upon our mind, we pronounce, we decree, we declare that you have committed the abominable crime of heretical apostasy, that you have abandoned yourself to the frightful practice of demonic evocation, and that in consequence you have incurred the sentence of excommunication and the other punishments of law, and that you should rightfully undergo the punishment in the form prescribed by the law and the canons of the Church.'

First came the sentence of excommunication, pronounced by the bishop of Nantes and the Inquisitor's delegate together, as penalty for the crimes of heresy and diabolic evocation. Another similar sentence was immediately pronounced by Jean de Malestroit alone, and that as penalty first, for the sacrilege committed at Saint-Étienne-de-Mer-Morte: violation of ecclesiastic immunity, then as penalty for the crimes against nature. These two kinds of crime did not come under the jurisdiction of the inquisitorial tribune, which was exclusively concerned with matters of dogma and faith.

Jean de Malestroit and the vice-inquisitor immediately asked the question, 'Do you wish to be reinstated in the bosom of the Church our mother, from which your crimes and the evocation of evil spirits have excluded you?' Gilles hastened to reply, 'I did not know what constituted heresy, and I did not know I had committed that crime. But since the crimes I have confessed are so classified, I beg you to reinstate me in the bosom of the Church.' So say-

ing, he bent his knees, sighed heavily and moaned.

The bishop and Jean Blouyn honored his request, but Gilles still remained upon his knees, and his sighs and laments did not cease. He had undergone a double sentence of excommunication, and only one seemed to him to have been lifted. He addressed his judges, 'I violated the immunity of the Church by penetrating the temple of Saint-Étienne-de-Mer-Morte and laying hands upon Jean le Ferron, a member of the clergy; I even railed at you, oh bishop of Nantes, and you, vicar of the Inquisition, and you, priests; thus have I offended God and His Church. Therefore you have pronounced a peremptory sentence upon me. I ask you to lift that penalty.'

'For love of God,' the bishop acceded to his plaint, and hastened to allow Gilles to participate in the communion of the faithful, and receive the Sacrament. Gilles intended immediately to take advantage of the indulgence granted; he wished to purify himself of the

abominations he had attested to, so he requested a priest. The tribunal appointed brother Jean Juvénal, of the order of the Carmelites of Ploërmel.

The temporal pain which the secular tribunal was surely going to inflict upon him, was nothing to Gilles beside the spiritual and eternal pain which he had just escaped. He could not doubt that this temporal pain — this pain of death, would be applied to him, for the condemnation of Poitou and Griart, his accomplices, warned him of what was in store for him. Would the greatest criminal of the three be spared? He could not believe so. Once more — what difference would it make? Death was but the passage to another life — the only everlasting life.

It was with a light step that he arrived at Bouffay, the seat of the civil tribunal. The pretorium was crammed with the curious; the parents and friends of the little victims awaited the avenging sentence. The act of accusation was read, and then the president invited the

accused to speak, ' quite plainly, and the shame he would feel would help to alleviate the anguish he would have to suffer in the hereafter.' By these words he made him understand that the humiliation of a public confession would surely shorten his stay in purgatory.

He would certainly not have refused to deserve the divine indulgence that president Pierre de l'Hospital invoked for him, after having already confessed his crimes three times, and at the very hour when he was to appear before a Judge who was much stricter in his eyes! So he spoke; he related the outrage at Saint-Étienne-de-Mer-Morte; the abominations, the child-murders, the cremation of victims and the diabolic pacts. His preceding confession was reread to him, and he confirmed all the facts which were contained therein. It was so frightful a confession, that the president, it has been said, ordered the image of Christ which hung upon the wall of the room, to be veiled!

The president addressed the honorable and

learned people who were present, and he questioned them. They answered that Gilles had deserved death, and they proposed various methods for him to undergo it. The president declared that first of all, Gilles had incurred 'pecuniary punishment' — he was to pay the sum of 50,000 *livres,* which the duke of Brittany had taxed him for his felony; after that, in expiation of his other crimes, he would be hung and burned alive. 'Gilles,' said the president, 'cry pardon of God, and prepare yourself to die in good estate and due contrition for having committed the said crimes. Tomorrow at eleven o'clock, the sentence will be executed.'

These terrible words fell upon Gilles, but they did not trouble him. He knew that his martyrdom and the sincerity of his contrition would gain him divine indulgence. Some hours before, his spirit might have been terrified, gripped by the shackles of excommunication and forbidden the sacraments. Now, what could it fear?

'I thank God, and I am grateful to you, *monsieur le Président,* that you have let me know the hour of my death. But permit me to make a request. Henriet and Poitou, my servants, have committed frightful crimes with me, for which they have deserved death; suffer that we die together and at the same time. I have been the chief cause of their downfall, and I would like to comfort them at the hour of execution, inform them of their salvation, and teach them by my example, how to die well. If it should be otherwise, and if my servants were to die first, they might fall into despair, imagining that they are the only ones to expiate our collective sins, and that I, the chief instigator, I who urged them into crime, was escaping the punishment. Allow me to precede them in death, and thus I shall be the cause of their salvation.'

'In consideration of your repentance,' the president conceded, 'it shall be done as you request. I shall even allow your body, before it is consumed, to be snatched from the stake,

placed in a casket and buried at Nantes in whatever church you wish.'

'I would like it to be interred in the church of Moustier de Notre-Dame des Carmes.'

The duke of Brittany was particularly fond of that chapel and he cherished a special devotion for the Virgin who was venerated there. Had he not, in 1420, while held prisoner at Champtoceaux by Olivier de Blois and his brother Charles, sworn that he would give his weight in gold to Our Lady of the Carmelites, if she would restore his liberty? Immediately after he was free, he went to the convent, climbed naked into one of the trays of the scales and filled the other with golden objects of all sorts, whose curious inventory the Breton historian dom Morice has preserved for us. Gilles could not then have begged a favor which would have been more flattering to the duke. The president immediately granted it to him.

'There remains one more favor for me to implore, *monsieur le Président;* I pray you to induce monseigneur the bishop of Nantes and

the clergy of his Church, to institute a general procession through the town, before our execution. They will pray to God, so that I and my servants will retain absolute confidence in our salvation to the very end.'

The president granted this third favor, and so this sensational controversy ended. Gilles was a happy man. He who at the time of the first sessions had roared, offended and denied, had undergone an almost miraculous transformation. The highway robber, the violent character and the contemner of all divine and human laws, was gentle as a lamb. He had simply and solely become a repentant Christian, who knew the active value of his repentance.

## X. Death

THE *Procès de Gilles de Raiz,* the record of the civil trial preserved in the National Archives, is the most important source relative to Gilles de Raiz' death, and we shall borrow extensively from it. No document could be more moving. However, we know nothing about the public procession which moved through the streets of the town on October 26th at nine o'clock in the morning, in conformance with the condemned man's request, and History has handed nothing down.

It may be conjectured that a ceremony requested by so famous an individual, who was a repentant criminal, and ordered under such exceptional circumstances by the bishop of Nantes, must have gathered the clergy of a good many urban parishes, and the members of the majority of religious congregations.

Doubtless the church-bells too were in full swing, lifting their own dolorous supplications to heaven. '*Miserere mei, Domine. . . .*' Have pity on me, Lord, for I am weak; heal me, Lord, for the evil has seeped to the very marrow of my bones. . . .

However it was, the rumor of Gilles' touching repentance, his voluntarily accepted expiation and his moving speeches — all these, added to the sight of so absolutely unusual a procession, consummated the transformation of public opinion. The crowd no longer saw a hideous monster in the condemned man, the 'beast of extermination,' thirsting for the blood of little children; it considered solely the great Christian who was about to die. Just as Gilles' mysticism had metamorphosed him, that of the crowd worked a similar miracle upon itself.

The procession was scarcely over, than another procession appeared — this one silent and tragic. The Marshal advanced, flanked by Henriet and Poitou. His face was calm and there was no expression upon it of fear or re-

volt. The cortège crossed the bridges which connected the island, known today as the *île Feydeau,* with the opposite shores. It halted on the meadows of the Loire, called the meadows of Biesse, almost about the spot occupied today by the square de l'Hotel Dieu. The banks of the stream were black with people; a great number of distinguished individuals could be observed, even the duke of Brittany himself, according to certain old accounts.

All along the way, Gilles preached to his accomplices, exhorting them to be 'strong and virtuous against diabolic temptation, and feel great misery and contrition for their sins, else they would alienate the mercy of God.' There was no sin so great, he added, for which sincere repentance could not gain a pardon of divine benevolence, provided one had a real determination not to sin again in the future. Then let us thank God for showing us so signal a sign of love, by allowing us to die 'in the enjoyment of health and good memory. Might He not have allowed us to be suddenly punished

for our evil deeds? Then let us show Him an ardent affection, and at the same time a great contrition for our sins.

'Fear no more to die in this world; it is so little a death, without which we would not be able to see God in His glory. How desirable it is to leave a world where there is only misery, to go to everlasting glory! In this base world, we three together have committed the same abominations; reunited as soon as our souls are separated from our bodies, we will see each other again, with God in His Glory, in His Paradise. I beg you, during this short moment of contrition, do not weaken; do not lose a happiness which never ends.'

Poitou and Henriet listened to these words which were so comforting, and so surprising, coming from the man who had counselled them to evil, and because of whom they were walking to the stake. They cried thanks to him, and assured him that they were resolved 'to save their souls, claiming that death in this world was quite agreeable to them.' They had confi-

dence in divine mercy, which would grant them Paradise. ' But in our turn,' they said to him, ' we counsel you to do what you yourself counsel us to do.' Thus the master and his servants, proceeding to the place of execution, mutually exhorted each other to supreme courage, just as formerly they had urged each other on in their criminal practices.

They arrived at the fatal place and Gilles joined his hands, thanking God once more and begging Him not to punish him in accordance with his sins. ' Merciful Lord,' he said, ' I have confidence in You; I surrender myself to You.' He turned to the silent and respectful audience: ' I am your Christian brother, you whose children I have slain. I beg you, by the Passion of Our Lord — pray for me and forgive me in good grace, as you desire God to absolve you of your own sins! '

The final moments were slipping by. Then he addressed himself to those he considered his heavenly protectors; he invoked Monseigneur Saint Jacques, for whom he had always cher-

THE TRIAL OF GILLES DE RAIZ

The bishop in the centre is Jean de Malestroit. The illustration appears in a Latin manuscript dated 1766, which is in the Bibliotheque Nationale.

ished a 'singular affection'; he prayed to Monseigneur Saint Michael — the same who had transfixed the infernal dragon with his flaming lance. He begged them to sustain him in these moments of anguish. 'Pray God for me, even though I have not obeyed you as I ought. Oh Archangel Saint Michael, when my soul escapes from my body, may it please you to receive it and present it before the Lord, that He might be compassionate to it!'

The summarized verbal process of this edifying death mentions still other 'beautiful speeches' made by the condemned. Then he ascended the steps of the gibbet. It was a fearful moment. According to his wish, he was to die first. Poitou and Henriet encouraged him, saying 'Be a strong and valiant knight in the love of God, remember His Passion, which has been the cause of our redemption.' The pathetic conversation ended with the consoling word 'redemption.' The hangman slipped the noose about Gilles' neck; the brazier was crackling.

Gilles was swung onto the gallows, and justice had been done.

Scarcely had he drawn his last breath, and before the fire had 'opened his body and exposed his entrails,' than a scene took place which well displays the vacillation of this crowd, stirred to the highest pitch and so willing to forget, forgive and allow pity to take the place in its heart of the most implacable and legitimate resentment.

Gilles had confessed his crimes; he had lowered his pride and stooped it to repentance before the public, which was flattered by such humiliation on the part of so great a lord. Gilles had wept. That was enough; all hearts were moved. Conceive of these crowds of the Middle Ages, all bowed before the same God, under the same spiritual or temporal leaders, who were powerful sources of authority or enthusiasm; consider that they were the more sensitive to great emotional currents, because individuals are more closely banded together by the same ideal, and more closely bound, and

you will be able to understand this sudden vacillation and this contagious intensity in a reaction of generosity.

They offered no resistance to the power of these spiritual tides; all souls were to obey the same impulse. Some 'demoiselles' of Gilles' lineage, according to Monstrelet; some ladies 'of high estate,' according to Jean Chartier, snatched this blackened and martyrized body from the flames and bathed it in their tears. Assisted by some nuns, they washed it and shrouded it piously and placed it in a casket.

Then, in melancholy speculation, they took the road to town. The chanting of the Psalms of Penitence was heard again, but now an accent of confidence and joy must have been added to its plaintive note. *Beati quorum remissae sunt iniquitates, et quorum tecta sunt peccata.* Happy are those whose iniquities have been pardoned, and whose sins have been erased! The feminine cortège passed back over the line of bridges, and bore the mortal remains

of one whose great repentance had made him a great saint, to the church of Moustier des Carmes. In order to prove to us that such were indeed the thoughts of these benevolent women, Jean Chartier reports that they insisted on keeping portions of his bones as relics; but that seems scarcely probable, since the body had not been destroyed.

Another form was soon to be given to the expression of popular opinion. A procession had, in Gilles' name, begged clemency of Heaven, and his death had been a freely accepted expiation, but that was not enough. Upon the order of Jean de Malestroit, an expiatory monument was erected on the meadows of Biesse at the very spot of the execution, which was designed to perpetually solicit divine mercy in Gilles' behalf, just as the candles placed at the altar's foot pray in the absence of those who placed them there.

According to certain authors, the structure represented the Virgin, Saint Gilles and Saint

Laud; according to others, a cross — doubtless it included both a cross and these three individuals. Its remnants — strange coincidence — were collected in the manor de la Touche, where Jean V died, which was the country-house of the bishop of Nantes, and today is an annex of the Departmental Museum of Archaeology.[1] This expiatory monument was to serve at the same time for the edification of future generations. It would remind them of the downfall of a Marshal of France; it would show what depths of vilification might be reached by those who, as the Breton chronicler Alain Bouchard expressed it, 'stoop their hearts to avarice and insatiable lust, and those who forget the fear of God.'

[1] These remnants constitute the sole material *souvenirs* of Gilles de Raiz. Gustave Flaubert, when passing through Nantes, disdained to see the now empty box in which the heart of Anne de Bretagne was formerly preserved, and he wrote this squib: 'I should have preferred to see the Marshal de Retz' trousers, rather than Madame Anne de Bretagne's heart; there were more passions in the one than grandeur in the other.' (*Par les Champs et par les Grèves,* 56.)

A legend was established, such as is generally built up about any marvellous occurrence; we try to make it still more marvellous. A Carmelite author contradicted Bertrand d'Argentré, claiming that Gilles was not touched by the flames, and insisting to the contrary, that the condemned 'being chained in the midst of the fire, burned and was afflicted with intolerable pain, without being consumed any more than Moses' burning bush; and that came of the fact that he had had imbedded in one arm a portion of the True Cross, which is still preserved by the Carmelites, and has since performed several miracles. But, preferring rather to die than continue to endure the heat of the fire, he requested a surgeon and had his arm lanced, and the portion of the Holy Cross which was therein, withdrawn, and gave it to the nuns who were present, and after being confessed (despite d'Argentré), was burned according to his sentence, and his ashes and bones were collected by the good Benedictine

nuns, who were at the time at the priory of Coëtz.[2]

It is plausible that Gilles, who was so desirous of meeting the devil and at the same time so terrified at the thought of seeing him face to face, had formerly had this relic imbedded in his arm; we have seen it serve as a protective shield during an evocation; but what interest could this singular fact have possessed for him at the hour of his death, when he had already been absolved and redeemed, and no longer feared the evil spirit?

What gave birth to this legend reported by the monk, was the possession, by his house, of the portion of the True Cross which belonged to Gilles. Perhaps he himself had offered it to his confessor, or better, to the convent which was to receive his mortal remains. What *is* certain, is that this two-fold relic was the object of pious pilgrimage from the 16th century on.

[2] Cf. A. de la Borderie and L. de Villiers, *Histoire des Carmes en Bretagne,* Rennes, 1896.

Women about to be confined were the chief pilgrims who came running to it[3] just as they hastened to the Virgin of the expiatory monument. They called her *la Vièrge de crée lait,* and begged that they might have good milk with which to successfully nourish the infant they would bring into the world.

The fact that expectant mothers, seeking an easy confinement, solicited the protection of one who had slaughtered so many innocent victims, is more touching than extraordinary, granted the immense faith of the population of that period. The people saw in Gilles a great sinner pardoned, who had thus become a powerful intermediary, and this religious phenomenon was to endure until that relatively recent time, when the tradition of Gilles de Raiz as prototype of the legendary Bluebeard was foolishly substituted for the original very orthodox tradition.

Such is the true, cruel and frequently mar-

[3] Fr. B. a. s. Euphrasia, *Delineato observantiae Carmelitarum Rhedonensis in provinciam Turonensi.*

vellous story of the martyrized Marshal. In order to understand this drama, psychologically so striking, in order to grasp the changeable but uncontradictory thoughts of the crowd, it is necessary to carry oneself back in thought to the period when these things happened. In our fathers' eyes, Gilles' example sank its roots into the very bosom of the biblical parables. It recalled to them the Evangel of the third Sunday after Pentecost: 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my lamb which was lost. . . .'

If Gilles did not succeed by magic and alchemy in producing the 'drachmas' he required in order to repurchase the goods he had sold, was he not himself, by his repentance, similar to the recovered drachma? 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the drachma which I lost. Verily I say unto you, there will be great joy among the angels of God for a single sinner who is penitent.' And it is because the Bretons who had centuries of faith behind them, so understood the death of one who had

slaughtered more than two hundred children, that for three centuries they came to pray at his tomb.[4]

[4] Gilles' case is not unique. At Abbeville, on September 6, 1764, a young gentleman names Charles de Valines, was executed and burned after his death, for having poisoned his father, mother, and uncle, and attempted to poison seven other people. He went to his execution displaying an intense remorse and lively religious feeling. His execution over, the crowd searched the pyre for remnants of his ashes, in order to keep them as relics. By contrast, two years later, the chevalier de la Barre having refused to repent, the crowd cheered at his execution and scattered his ashes to the wind.

# PART TWO

## I. The Wife of Gilles de Raiz

THE pseudo-Bluebeard had only one wife, Catherine de Thouars, and the rôle she played in his life seems to have been sufficiently inconspicuous. Though Gilles sacrificed a great number of little victims to his shameful passions, he respected the life of his wife. But it could not have been out of any love he bore her: she, whom on the 30th of November in 1420, he had married in so cavalier a fashion, after the armed abduction, had only been sought for her handsome fortune, and it does not seem that Gilles consequently lavished signs of extraordinary affection on her. Besides, we are not aware that he had a passion for the feminine, in the proper sense of the word, and the young girls he sadistically slaughtered could not have held any place in his heart.[1]

[1] None of the plaintiffs spoke of the disappearance of little girls, but they were confessed by the accomplices;

The daughter of Milet II of Thouars, from the little we can discover about her among the old records, seems to have been a woman who was essentially devoted to the maintenance of her fortune. She lived most frequently at Pouzauges, the estate so admirably situated on the wooded hills of Bas-Poitou, at the extreme border of the Bocage Vendéen, towards la Plaine. She was not frequently found in the wake of her formidable husband, and when she is mentioned as being in one of his castles, it is practically certain that the master was absent. In January and in May 1434, she paid visits to Machecoul; in September of the same year, to Tiffauges. Shortly thereafter, she arrived at Chantocé, and oversaw some reconstruction-work. Wherever her passing is noted, it was for questions of a financial nature, or for the purpose of attempting to put obstacles in the path of the impending ruin.

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and then, just as we lack sections of the controversy, we cannot be sure that we have absolutely all the results of the inquiries which were instituted.

What satisfaction could this woman with her serious and reflective mind have found in living among the adventurers, necromancers and ruffians of every description who surrounded Gilles de Raiz and devoured him? Would not her presence have constituted some sort of approbation of his mad expenditures, his senseless performances and luxurious chapel?

But according to the *Mémoire des Héritiers*, it was not so much Catherine who lived apart from Gilles as Gilles who, no longer able to suffer any member of his family about him, sent her off to Pouzauges. He feared lest an authoritative voice make him ashamed of his depraved life. Similarly, the letters-patent of Charles VII, which treat of Gilles' succession, tell us that he would not permit 'his said wife, nor other relative or friend, to interfere with his affairs in any way.'[2] Above all, he feared that the secret of the frightful mysteries would

[2] *Cartulaire de Raiz*, no. 258. Letters of January 13, 1446, frequently utilized because of their importance.

leak through the massive walls of his dungeons, and he shuddered at the thought of the tortures reserved for murderers.

Yes, he trembled lest someone unexpectedly enter the sacrificial hall, at the moment consecrated to his infamous delights, when, seated on the breast of his dying victim and regarding it from the side with a sardonic grin, he abandoned himself to the learned inventions of his sanguinary art; or at the moment when the naked body, still warm, aroused new desire and underwent the worst defilement.[3]

When the request of interdiction launched against the wretch by Catherine and his family had been granted, it is probable that the physical separation of the couple became even more complete. It would not have been prudent for a wife, guilty of such audacity, to pre-

[3] M. Bossard, page 196, asserts that, according to a paragraph in Poitou's confession which, he adds, is scarcely clear, Jean de Craon had undoubtedly one day entered the sacrificial room at the moment the holocaust was going on. We have found nothing of this nature in the text.

sent herself again before her husband. Henceforth she was to be nothing in his life.

No more was she anything in his death! They had the discretion not to call her to the sittings of the scandalous trial. Doubtless they wanted to forget that she knew. But we can be certain that, despite the wrongs her husband perpetrated against her, if she had believed in his innocence she would have hastened to appear and tell the truth, if it were only to save the honor of his name and her daughter's future. She did not appear; she remained silent, just as her brother-in-law, René de la Suze remained silent, and just as all the other members of the family, whose escutcheon could not escape being splattered by these torrents of blood and filth.

With the drama ended, she had but one desire: to change her name and try, after such cruel reverses, to seek her happiness again. She still had a handsome enough fortune — at the time of her marriage, Gilles had set aside a dowry for her, which she had the right to

claim. She was then, what one is accustomed to call a good catch . . . and Gilles' sanctified death might also have constituted an attenuation of the repulsion which might have been inspired by the fact that she was his widow.

She did not have long to wait; scarcely a few months after her husband's death, a lord of the land of Chartres, Jean II of Vendôme, vidame of Chartres, presented himself. He obtained her hand, and the marriage took place on June 14th, 1442.

Thereafter, hers was a calm life, devoid of striking incidents and therefore without a history. We only know that Catherine engaged in a long struggle with her brother-in-law, René de la Suze, for the promised dowry. We may truly say that Gilles de Raiz' goods and estates had been bewitched by one of the damnable evocators to whom he appealed, for they only served to sow discord and hatred among those who coveted them, or actually had a right to them. Catherine died on December 2nd, 1462, without having received a thing. Thus she kept

neither Gilles' name, nor the estates which he had allotted her. And with her daughter married, her new country must have more or less lost sight of the sad hero with whom her life had been bound up during eighteen years.

Catherine de Thouars had sought to be forgotten, and she found it in her own period — even better, posterity also forgot her, and her memory has remained much less alive among us than that of the six hypothetical wives of the hypothetical Bluebeard.

And all that came of the fact that she was not killed, or threatened with being killed.

## II. The Daughter of Gilles de Raiz

ABOUT the year 1429[1] a child came into the world, to which everything seemed to promise an enchanted future. About the cradle of this frail offspring of the oldest and most opulent seignorial families of the West — the Lavals, Craons, Raiz and Machecouls — one might say that the most benevolent fairies held their rendezvous. What Prince Charming would one day covet the hand of such an heiress, whose father, within a few years, was to be a Marshal of France? What brilliant fate was to be hers?

[1] The texts are quite vague concerning the date of Marie de Raiz' birth. The letters-patent of Charles VII of January 13, 1446, credit her with the age of four or five at the time of her father's death. This was evidently a copyist's error, since we know from the general proxy granted to Briqueville, and dated December 28, 1434, that at that time Marie had already been born, and was five years old.

Alas! if among these sympathetic fairies, one with an evil countenance were to have lifted her harsh voice and said, 'Marie de Raiz will know little of happiness upon earth,' the surprise would have been great, and moreover, it would have been the truth, for the whole world was soon to topple about the daughter of Gilles de Raiz.

What crueler fate could there have been for this child, sold by her father! One day, it will be remembered, drunk or maddened by the pack of creditors baying at his heels, Gilles authorized his companion, Roger de Briqueville to make, in his name, all contracts he desired, and even marry his daughter to whomever he might please — full power to dispose of his goods and his blood.

Briqueville, a young Norman squire who had fled from his home because of the English invasion, had come to seek refuge with his cousin, Gilles de Raiz. He soon had his entire confidence, and displayed himself among the more active of the huntsmen of the human game

which was destined for the orgies of indulgence and blood. He was capable of every infamy, but he did not, however, make use of the odious privilege of taking advantage of a child yielded him by an unnatural father. Doubtless he had no interest in it.

Did Marie, who must have been eleven years old when her father expiated his crimes, profit by this fact? It is difficult to say, for her mother, before remarrying, hastened to marry her off and she was scarcely of an age to give her opinion. Her heart was sacrificed.

Perhaps, it is true, there was less personal interest in this haste, than real maternal love. During those centuries of brutality and rapine, the fate of isolated women was constantly in danger, and wisdom enjoined Catherine de Thouars not to forget the protection of her child, before thinking of her own arrangements.

Cases of women remaining single, outside the protection of convents, which were covered by the ecclesiastic immunity, and widows remaining widows, appear to have been singu-

larly less numerous than in our own times, and if you judge by the fashion in which seignorial marriages were usually contracted, mutual inclination was neither its cause nor its cementing element.

Thus it was that Catherine, instead of choosing for her daughter a fiancé whom she might have learned to love, from among the young lords of the district, preferred someone solid, influential, and who was a protector: Prégent de Coétivy, Admiral of France, one of the most celebrated men of the kingdom, and forty-four years of age.

Nor was there any sentiment attached to this union on Prégent's side. The Admiral was nothing of a gallant, and if he promised to take the orphan's cause in hand, it was not out of the simple kindness of his heart; he hoped that a reversal of the trial would be possible, and the sequestered estates be thus reclaimed. He saw a business proposition, and that was all. The contract was founded on the following profitable basis: in the event of Prégent's dying

childless, a third of the goods he might succeed in recovering was to pass to the Coétivy family; as for the debts — they would be paid off, half by the Coétivys, and half by the Lavals.

It was a lucrative agreement. However, the Admiral, though certainly hesitant and anxious over the final result, did not hasten to consummate so well-begun an enterprise. He delayed the marriage and the attendant return of the child to her family, till she be of age, as the laws of the period required, for more than a year. Surprised, the Lavals, who were afraid that the disposal of Gilles de Raiz' daughter would prove difficult, intervened and pressed him. Coétivy finally decided, and on the 14th of June in 1442, the marriage was celebrated.

There was no happier choice in the light of the young woman's material concerns. In claiming what he said were his rights, Coétivy was to display a typically Breton stubbornness. He had already proved his talent in that direc-

tion, having rounded out his fortune with goods confiscated from the lords who had gone over to the English cause. A business man, as greedy for gain as he was brave in battle, he began the struggle.

The beginning was promising, and he succeeded in having the king name him Marie de Raiz' trustee, that is to say, entrusted with the 'government, administration, pursuit and defense of the rights, goods, suits, affairs and negotiations of the said, Marie, his wife.'[2] Several other similar acts clearly display both his ceaselessly watchful activity and great influence over the mind of Charles VII.

Certain of success, he thought, he now drove directly at the established goal. He falsely assured the king that, at the time of his trial, Gilles had made an appeal directly to his own justice, and this appeal, not having been transmitted to him, a reversal of the trial was necessary.

[2] Act dated August the 13th, 1443.

At first the king seemed willing to listen to the Admiral's advice, and he made an initial step in the direction the latter attempted to lead him. He never made a second, for he feared to set his foot down in blood.

For more than a hundred years, the dukes of Brittany had permitted appeals from their court to the Parliament of Paris, but only in case of refusal of justice and mistrial. Contrary to Coëtivy's statement, Gilles, in saying that he appealed from the bishop's tribunal, had not specified to whom he intended to appeal. However, that omission would not have deterred the sovereign, had he not known the frightful authenticity of the accusation.

The duke of Brittany and the bishop of Nantes had had the undeniable courage to attack a Marshal of France who, though disgraced, none the less represented a power, and the king had to respect their judgment, since there had neither been refusal of justice nor mistrial.

Happily, in those troubled times, Justice was more obeyed than one generally imagines, and no man, were he the most formidable of lords, dared set himself above the law, for he would have found himself above the platform of the gallows. Charles VII, in abandoning his idea of a retrial, showed that he too was aware of the ' dolorous cry ' of the two hundred Angevin, Poitevin and Breton families, who were steeped in mourning and despair. As for Coétivy, he was not discouraged. Having failed in the matter of the sequestered estates, he turned to the lordships formerly bought from Gilles de Raiz by Jean V — Ingrandes and Chantocé. Insidiously, he showed his sovereign the danger of these two Angevin fortresses, now become Breton and therefore of questionable loyalty. The king, who this time could not have the same scruples he had about the reversal of the trial, declared Ingrandes and Chantocé confiscated. The motive was obvious: they belonged to Gilles de Bretagne, son of Jean V, to whom the latter had transferred them, and

Gilles de Bretagne was a supporter of the English cause.[8] Once they were in the hands of the king, Coétivy appropriated the two fortresses to his own uses, and the trick was turned.

It was his last victory. A short time after, on June 20th, 1450, even before being able to enter Chantocé, the object of so much covetousness, helmeted and on horseback, he died, struck by an English bullet, beneath the walls of Cherbourg. And in his *History of Charles VII,* Jean Chartier declared, 'It was a great shame and a great loss to the king, for he was considered among the most valiant and famous knights of the kingdom, very prudent and vigorous.'

Here then, was Marie de Raiz, a widow at twenty-one. What affection had she felt for her

[8] Gilles de Bretagne was the brother of François I who succeeded his father, Jean V in 1442, and the brother of Pierre II (1450–1457) and Arthur III (1457). The latter was succeeded by his grand-nephew, François II, the last duke of Brittany (1458–9 to September 1488).

husband? No one can say; but what can be established, is the fact that she could not have helped but pay homage to her husband's clever and persistent efforts to rehabilitate her fortune.

Then she was alone and unsupported, and every appetite and ambition rioted about her. At the time of the Admiral's decease, she was at Taillebourg, at the home of her brothers-in-law, Alain, cardinal of Avignon, Olivier, grand seneschal of Guyenne and Christophe, who were each as avaricious as the other. They imprisoned her, with the connivance of Pierre de Bretagne, successor of François I, who wanted badly to recover Chantocé, which had been given to Coétivy. By means of threats they obliged her to sign an agreement whereby she relinquished to them the administration of her goods. Satisfied, they restored her liberty, but the young woman, once out of prison, complained to the king. She complained of the constraint under which she had made the agreement, the king intervened and order was re-

stored. The alarm had been a lively one, and Marie must have feared renewed danger. The solitude which terrified her mother, frightened her in her turn, and she remarried. She chose one of her cousins, André de Laval-Lohéac, Admiral and Marshal of France. This time we have the right to think that it was a union of two hearts, and not the association of two financial interests.

Marie's entrance into Laval upon her husband's arm, took place under the most novelistic circumstances. The same day, in fact, Françoise de Dinan, widow of the unfortunate Gilles de Bretagne — whose brother, François I, had dragged him from prison to prison for four years and then had strangled beneath the sombre arches of the castle of la Hardouinaie, pretending he was a traitor and had gone over to the English — she too entered town with her new husband, Guy XIV, count of Laval. It was an encounter, at a solemn moment in their lives, between two equally tragic women: the widow of an assassinated prince, and the

daughter of a Marshal of France who had died at the stake.

In the reclamation of Marie's goods, André de Laval was to be a worthy successor of Prégent. The situation was now more complicated than ever, since to proceed to the recovery of the sequestered estates required instituting suit against the Coétivys themselves, because of the famous third promised them by the marriage-contract with Prégent.

Already, at the beginning of April 1451, following the announcement of the marriage, Olivier de Coétivy, worried over this third, had left Taillebourg with an imposing retinue of eighteen people, and met the fiancé, André de Laval-Lohéac at Fontenay-le-Comte. They had not been able to reach a settlement, for Laval-Lohéac preferred to keep everything for himself.

Fruitless litigation followed, and death dogged their footsteps. It came and put an end to the worries of Gilles de Raiz' daughter: Marie expired prematurely, scarcely twenty-

eight years of age, in the castle of Vitré, which belonged to her husband's elder brother. Her body lay in the church of this old Breton hamlet, behind the choir. On her tombstone, they carved: 'Here lies Madame Marie, bride of the high and mighty lord André de Laval, in his time lord of Lonioux and Kergorlay, and Marshal of France; which lady expired the first day of November of the year 1457.'

Gilles de Raiz' daughter was good and benevolent. She walked upon the earth, doing good. She loved to surround herself with young girls, overwhelmed them with all kinds of gifts, and found in their society a refuge from the unkindness of men. She who had been abandoned to the ignominious tutelage of Roger de Briqueville, retained as her best friends the daughters of this same Briqueville, with whom she had been raised. She adored children and perhaps considered the hardship of not having any, as a punishment from Heaven for her father's crimes.

Jean Harsenet, Prégent de Coétivy's *maître d'hôtel,* has left us a very informative account-book.[4] There, beside the expenditures made by his master, we may find those made by his mistress. Beneath the aridity of nomenclature and figures, we may catch a glimpse of the immensity of her ceaselessly vigilant tenderness towards all the misery which surrounded her. The Admiral was careful to fill her purse, thus, on Easter Eve he gave her twenty-seven *sous* and six *deniers,* 'to give offerings and alms' — a considerable sum at that time.

Where did these alms go? They went to the wife of Jean the groom, for whom she bought three ells of cloth; they went 'to a man of Raiz,' who had broken a leg; they went to master Thomas, an invalid, who had come to ask assistance, or to 'the miller's daughter, who is getting married,' or to 'Julienne,' to whom she offered a hood.

[4] Paul Marchegay, *Documents relatifs à Prégent de Coétivy,* p. 56 in *Arch. Hist. du Poitou,* VI.

And with what delicate attentions and gifts was her immedate retinue not overwhelmed! One day she bought two and a half ells of linen to make two blouses for the daughter of Monseigneur le sénéchal de Guyenne, her niece. Price — ten *sous,* ten *deniers;* workmanship, twenty *deniers.* Another time, there was the purchase of 'twelve pairs of shoes' for Catherine and Jeanne de Briqueville, and 'for the little girls'; there was the purchase 'of a powder for Mesdames de Lansac and Anne du Boys,' or of 'two hundred clasps for the little girls' dresses.'

We could never finish enumerating all her liberalities. To conclude, let us cite this: Colette, Philippe and Tanguy du Boys, Guillaume de Briqueville and Jacquet d'Aunay had been bitten by a mad dog. It is well known that until a very recent time, sea-bathing was reputed to be the best remedy against rabies. If, while bathing, the bitten person ducked his head under a wave for a moment and seemed to see the mad dog, his case was extremely serious;

otherwise, it was believed, he had the greatest chance of recovery. Marie de Raiz defrayed the expenses of her friends' sojourn at the seashore.

With the aid of Jean Harsenet's same account-book, we seem to see her, going from one house to another, dressed with the distinction suited to her rank, wearing cloaks of light or dark gray, the collar and sleeves of her dress trimmed with the fur of a 'black lamb' or 'unborn lamb.' She went about seeking to alleviate misfortune. One might say that, in her own measure, she wished to blot out the sad memories that had clung to her name when a young girl.

By her virtues and her resignation, Marie de Raiz provided the most striking contrast to her father, and she seems really to have been of another race and another time. She is the touching proof that in those dark and barbarous times, when almost all men revealed themselves as violent, vindictive and cruel, women were their superiors by their gentility, integrity

and pity. And we wonder still more when we consider that this young woman, who was such a model of these virtues, was the daughter of one of the greatest scoundrels of all time.

## III. The Family of Gilles de Raiz

THE existence of those who have preceded us on this earth, and who have not accomplished anything exceptional, is revealed to us only by their transactions and their law-suits. Our fathers loved money, and hence the wrangling. Without their acts of purchase, sale and exchange, and especially, without their judicial scrap-books, their journey through this world would not have left the slightest trace. The names which occasional green and broken tombstones have preserved for us, are quite terse. The bones themselves, anonymous or not, have most frequently returned to dust.

Happily, their old possessors went to law, and they went repeatedly. The registrar's papers and parchments last longer than funereal inscriptions, and much longer than the bones buried in the soil of old cemeteries. Thanks to

them, the memory of our ancestors has leaped the obstacle of centuries and come down to us.

The banal life of René de la Suze, brother of Gilles de Raiz, is amply illuminated by the thick bundles of his innumerable law-suits. We know the principal ones: suit against his brother, over Chantocé; suit against the vidame de Chartres, second husband of Catherine de Thouars, over the dowry allotted her by the defunct Marshal; did not the vidame de Chartres voice his intention of making the said dowry over to Jean de Vendôme, the son who was the issue of his marriage with Catherine, to the detriment of the natural heiress to these goods — Marie de Raiz? Finally, the lawsuit over the recovery of the sequestered estates, when, by the death of Marie, René became the most immediate representative of the Raiz family. He was a cunning and persistent man, who based his struggles firmly upon the elementary and traditional principle of the return of the family property to the family. It was true that he had abetted his brother during

those days of vainglorious madness, but then he was so young. Since then he had become aware of the value of money, and had seen the consequences of these resounding pranks.

Among the titles of his ancestors, he had chosen that of lord of la Suze, which had been borne by his grandfather, Jean de Craon.[1] He even possessed a certain moral resemblance to his grandfather. His was the same avaricious character, jealous of the family honor, but he displayed himself to be less brutal, and we do not find his name mixed up in any act of unjust violence.

Of all the actions begun or supported by him, the most important involved in the history of the drama which concerns us, is certainly that of the recovery of his brother's

[1] La Suze was a lordship situated in le Maine. It was because Jean de Craon possessed that title, that the same name was given to the manor which he had constructed in the heart of Nantes. Gilles' last exploit, in 1434, was actually to take part in Richemont's expedition to deliver la Suze, which was besieged by the English. Today it is the capital city of the canton of la Sarthe.

estates, which had been sequestered. To obtain these estates and goods, it was first necessary to accomplish the annulment of the judgment of Nantes. Coëtivy and Laval-Lohéac had successively tried it, but had not been able to succeed. In his turn, René became madly involved in the laborious work. His scribes blackened parchment, and drew up for him the voluminous *Mémoire des Héritiers,* from which we have copiously drawn. His lawyers piled law-suit upon law-suit.

To tell the truth, the circumstances had never seemed more favorable to a reversal of the decision. Years had passed, and the actors had disappeared. In place of Jean V, there was François II, and the functionaries of the tribunals had also been replaced. Men carry the wickedness of their hearts with them into the tomb, so if Gilles had been the victim of a conspiracy, those who had concocted it had left for a land from which they could do no damage.

But alas! René, more than any other, knew the truth. He could not speak of innocence, all

the fallacious reasons he broached were not worth a continental, and in 1474 he also died without having succeeded, deceived, bitter and unlucky — thirty-four years after his brother, and fourteen years after his niece. His pleas and law-suits, as almost always happens, far from enriching him, had ruined him. Jeanne, the only daughter he had of his marriage with Marie de Champagne, had married François de Chauvigny, prince of Déols,[2] and the couple subsisted in a condition which approximated misery. To profit by the situation, duke François II later consented to pay him 40,000 *livres*, but on condition that he abandon his claims to the perennial Chantocé. Hunger had its claws in the prince and his wife, they accepted and signed everything desired.

As it was fated that Gilles de Raiz' poisoned fortune would incite litigations and quarrels to the bitter end, the suit with the Coétivys over the third of the goods promised to Prégent out of what he might succeed in reclaiming, con-

[2] Déols, near Chateauroux (Indre).

tinued to enlist lawyers, scribes and judges of both sides, in interminable juridic tournaments.

What good was all this turmoil and effort? Jeanne de la Suze and François de Chauvigny had but one son, André, who himself died in 1502, without issue.

Thus, fifty-two years after the death of the man who had ruined himself because he loved luxury, vain parade and the deceitful enchantments of popularity too well, his family, despite its princely title, died out nearly penniless. One might even suppose that if it had not been that of so illustrious a person and so celebrated a criminal, no historian would have attempted to carefully resurrect its vague memory from that tomb of the past we call the Archives.

## IV. Alias Bluebeard

WE have studied the two hypotheses of Gilles de Raiz as Bluebeard and Gilles de Raiz-Innocent, in an article in the *Revue Universelle*,[1] and we ought here concisely to state the principal reasons why both these theories are rationally and historically untenable.

Bluebeard, Perrault tells us, had seven wives, of whom he killed six; but Gilles de Raiz had only one wife, and she survived him. In Gilles' case we find sadism and satanism, but there was nothing of that nature in Bluebeard, and his was a completely different make-up.

Where did Perrault find the subject of Bluebeard? Perhaps simply in his imagination, or perhaps rather in a legend which we encounter in an almost identical form among all the races of Indo-European origin. This universal legend

[1] *Revue Universelle,* September 15, 1925.

has seemed to find its source in the depths of the enormous solar myth; Bluebeard would then be the Sun God, anthropomorphized during a relatively recent period; the little key would be the Dawn, which opens the portals of the East, and the seven women would be the seven Pleiades, wives of the Sun God.[2]

In Brittany, this bloodthirsty giant is represented by an individual named Cômor, who supposedly lived in the 6th century. Cômor had already had several successive wives killed. Guérok, count of Vannes, first refused him his daughter Triphina in marriage, then, upon the solicitation of Saint Gildas, who promised him that she would be returned to him ' healthy and unharmed ' whenever he required, he granted her to Cômor. Soon, Triphina, learning that the latter was in the habit of killing his wives, escaped. Cômor pursued her, caught her and cut off her head. The poor wretch's father then set out to find Saint Gildas, who resuscitated Tri-

[2] Doctor M. Baudouin, *La Médicine internationale*, 1919.

phina and gave her back to her father ' healthy and unharmed,' as he had promised him. Was this melancholy story, which curiously became a hagiographic legend, the source of Perrault's tale? No one knows. But we can more readily grasp the origin of the Gilles de Raiz-Bluebeard mélange. In the present commune of Loroux-Bottereau, Gilles owned an estate called ' la Verrière.' Another Verrière existed quite near Nantes, on the banks of the Erdre. In 1820, Richer, who was preparing an *Itinéraire de la rivière d'Erdre,* discovered it and believed that it was the one concerned with Gilles de Raiz. Even better, perceiving seven trees growing side by side, he immediately thought of trees planted in expiation of a seven-fold crime. From that, to recall Bluebeard's wives was but a single step — a sufficiently long step, in truth, since Perrault's Bluebeard in reality only killed six wives — but after all, a wife more or less. . . . He launched the new sensation: discovery of the expiatory monument erected at la Verrière to the memory of Bluebeard's wives.

Nothing propagates more readily than error, and when this error is associated with celebrated names, it flies at full speed. Michelet, Mourain de Sourdeval, Wallon . . . all rallied to the seductive supposition: Bluebeard and Gilles de Raiz — a single person! It succeeded. Gilles de Raiz' castles became the castles of Bluebeard.

The legend-manufacturers still persist. Did not a Parisian doctor recently lay claim to having discovered a vein of gold beneath the castle of Machecoul; which, in his eyes, constituted a proof of Gilles de Raiz' innocence? But the minute its owner, the mayor of Machecoul, proposed to sell his castle and his . . . vein of gold to the ingenious prospector, the latter changed his mind. It was not Machecoul, he said, but the castle of la Bellière, in the Angevin Mauges. But even if the soil of la Bellière were auriferous, it never belonged to the Raiz family. Gilles might well laugh about it in his beard — which was not blue.

He might be even more astonished at the

THE EXECUTION OF GILLES DE RAIZ

From a manuscript in the Bibliotheque Nationale.

somewhat naïve devotion of his defenders, he who publicly and repeatedly avowed the enormity of his crimes. But let us examine the hypothesis. First of all, Voltaire and the Benedictines of the *Art of verifying dates*,[3] cast doubt upon his culpability. Later, Parenteau, curator of the Archæological Museum of Loire-Inférieure, transformed the doubt into a definite assertion of his innocence, without attempting to prove it. M. Salomon Reinach came along in his turn, and then there was a grand battle. This was during the heroic period of the Dreyfus affair. Moreover, there was no possible similarity between the two controversies, and the precedent of a recognized judicial error in the Gilles de Raiz affair, could not have strengthened the proofs of the acquitted captain's innocence. M. Noël Valois, keeper of the National Archives, replied to his colleague in the Institute, and several savants, well-versed in the history of Brittany, supported M. Noël

[3] A learned historical work, written by the Benedictines, during the 18th century. (Translator's note.)

Valois. Many others had already rallied to the flag of Michelet, who could not be reproached with being ignorant of the Middle Ages, and who, having studied the record of the canonical trial at Nantes, declared himself convinced of Gilles' guilt. Here are a few names: MM. Bertholé, late archivist of Deux-Sèvres; Marchegay and Port, late archivists of Maine-et-Loire; René Blanchard, late archivist of the town of Nantes; Petit-Dutaillis in Lavisse's *History of France* (IV, 184), and de la Martinière, archivist of Morbihan, who wrote, 'The more frightful the accusation, the more one requires it to be supported by decisive proofs. Those given by M. Reinach are not able to alter our conviction.'[4]

On the other side, M. Monod supported M. Salomon Reinach, but we shall see why. As for M. Charles Langlois, their colleague of the Institute, he does not seem to have been persuaded by M. Noël Valois. Such were the prin-

[4] La Martinière, *Jean de Malestroit*, in *Soc. d'Hist. et d'Arch. de Bret.*, 1920.

cipal combatants; let us examine the attack, and let us give the replies and add our own opinion, all very briefly.

'Gilles de Raiz,' said M. S. Reinach, 'had sold his goods to Jean V, duke of Brittany and to Jean de Malestroit, bishop of Nantes. The ones he sold to the duke, he had actually *pawned* for 100,000 gold crowns; he could repurchase them any time during the next six years. But the two acquisitors believed, *as all people of their time,* in the possibility of changing metals to gold; they feared that by means of alchemy, Gilles would succeed and acquire the 100,000 gold crowns necessary for the repurchase. Therefore they concocted a trial for magic and sodomy, which, brought before the Inquisition, condemned Gilles without permitting him the services of a lawyer.'

Is this data exact? First of all, the lands purchased by the bishop were so purchased with a clear title, and the price had been paid. The sale could not then have been annulled, whatever the results of Gilles' experiments. Then, noth-

ing can prove that Jean V and Jean de Malestroit 'believed as all people of their time' in alchemy. Finally, had they believed in it, that is not enough, one may avow, upon which to accuse them of having engineered Gilles' death. On the other hand, M. Reinach does not deny that Gilles was really engaging in alchemy. Then, was not the tribunal of this affair, the tribune of the Inquisition? As for the lawyer's services, they were not only lacking to heretics, but even to accused parties in common law, appearing at the Châtelet. Well? And besides, Gilles' judges begged him to defend himself frequently enough for us to be convinced that they did not want to prevent him from speaking. Even better, in trials for heresy, the accused did not know the names of the witnesses called against him. Gilles was told these names.

'Gilles considered himself so innocent that he presented himself before the ecclesiastic tribune of his own accord.'

Not at all. A certain Jean Labbé, captain

under Jean V, had to fulfill the office of gendarme . . .

'On July 3rd, 1440, the bishop of Nantes declared that he had learned of Gilles' crimes from eight people whom he named, and various other people "of good reputation" whom he did not otherwise designate. Quite a small number of witnesses for 140 murders,' said the eminent Academician.

The bishop of Nantes' act only enumerated the witnesses from Nantes, while the majority of the murders had been committed in Anjou and Poitou.

'These witnesses are insignificant, since they came of the lowest class of society.'

!

'As for the people "of good reputation," these were *certainly* mercenaries, paid by the bishop.'

M. Reinach does not tell us upon what he founds this accusation. Furthermore, he does not tell us why he attacks the canonical trial primarily, and neglects the civil trial which,

moreover, sent Gilles to his death. M. Noël Valois has filled in this gap: it is because there we may observe a procession of eighty-two witnesses. It was a regrettable omission on the part of Gilles' defender, who thought better of it later, and in a memoir in the Academy, wrote, 'The testimonials produced against Gilles amounted to about 110 (in the two trials). It would require a volume to demonstrate their inanity.'

If the testimonials were of so little value, they would fall of themselves, and there would be no need of a volume to refute them. The reader has seen these miserable folk appear, saying, 'I had a child . . .' Let him judge!

'The best proof that they had a grudge against Gilles alone, is that with the exception of Poitou and Henriet, his accomplices were not punished.'

The sections of the trial were not taken down integrally, and we know today, from other sources, that other sentences were pronounced. Prélati found himself condemned to life-im-

prisonment. Roger de Briqueville was similarly punished when, sixteen years after the drama, attempting to benefit by a royal act of pardon, he acknowledged having been one of Gilles' procurers of children. As for la Meffraie, tradition reports that she died in prison. Then again, if they had a grudge against Gilles alone, why did they make Poitou and Griart ascend the gibbet — poor wretches who had not sold their goods, and for good reason, to the duke of Brittany?

'The depositions of these two accomplices, Poitou and Griart, are really too similar. . . . It was a sorry farce, etc.'

Too similar!

'These testimonials were obtained by "promise or torture."'

The word 'or' indicates the anemic quality of the reasoning. The beginning of Poitou's confession reads thus: 'Poitou recognized and confessed without any torture, the things which follow.' Perhaps these words merely constitute a formula, signifying that the accused spoke

with sincerity, but nothing can tell, and we do not know whether they were submitted to torture. As for a promise, what could they have been promised — they were executed?

'The removal of the skeletons in the tower of Chantocé is unlikely. Why did Gilles not rather throw these remains in the Loire?'

Because the Loire, which is nearly dry one time of the year, would have left these frightful proofs upon the sand; they had to be obliterated and could not have been except at Machecoul, since Chantocé was to be given over to René de la Suze the next day.

'If the plaintiffs were of the lower order of society, neither were the witnesses of the crimes glittering aristocrats.'

There was, nevertheless, one Roger de Briqueville, of good Norman nobility; one Gilles de Sillé, the Marshal's cousin, and one Hicquet de Brémont. Since he was so prudent, would Gilles have dared involve the canons of his collegiate in his crimes? What is quite astonishing, is that of the great number of priests

and nobles who lived on him, not one protested at the time of his arrest; not one emulated Peter's gesture by drawing his sword to defend his Master. Were they included among those people 'of good reputation' whom the bishop did not name? No one knows.

'Gilles confessed, it is understood, and on several occasions; but *either* Gilles, maltreated in his prison and dumbfounded by the treason of his servants, had gone mad, *or* all his confessions were extorted from him by horrible threats.'

This 'either' strips the statement of all weight. There are a great many 'or's and 'perhaps's' in the theory of his innocence.

'A conspiracy. . . . Terrorized witnesses . . . etc.'

One hundred and ten witnesses of whom many were women, and not one who later revealed the conspiracy! And in what dark sacristy had the bishop of Nantes had the 240 vanished children locked up during the trial? No report informs us that they ever reappeared.

'The proof of Gilles' innocence still lies in the fact that the president, Pierre de l'Hospital, promised him alleviation of his suffering, if he would confess.'

The text says, 'alleviation of the pain he would suffer in the hereafter.' There was no question of earthly suffering, but of his suffering in purgatory, which would be minimized by a public confession. This was a serious misconstruction which evidently came of the fact that, though M. Reinach knows the mysteries of pagan religions through and through, he is much less cognizant of the very elements of Christian theology.[5]

'These crimes of which he was accused are those which are charged against "the Vaudois, Fraticellis, sorceresses and Jews. These accusations are part of the eternal arsenal of human malignity, playing upon the credulity of ignorance."'

No one can contest the fact that fanaticism

[5] This error influenced M. Gabriel Monod to come over to the side of Gilles' innocence. (*Revue Historique*, 1907, 356.)

has had its victims; but no more can one deny, in history, the reality of child-murder, whether it be sadistic or ritualistic. For example, does the story of the Hanoverian butcher Haarmann who, last year (1925) killed twenty-eight young people, drank their blood and sold their flesh to his customers, belong to the eternal arsenal of human stupidity?

'If Gilles had been guilty, his wife would have buried herself in a convent out of shame.'

Since when have *other* people's crimes led to the religious calling? Catherine de Thouars preferred to remarry, and she married Jean de Vendôme, vidame of Chartres. As for Marie de Raiz, her daughter, she married her to Prégent de Coétivy, Admiral of France and a Breton who was astute, greedy, well thought of in court, and who tried to have the trial set aside with the aim of obtaining the goods which had been sequestrated. He succeeded in interesting Charles VII in his cause, and on January 3rd, 1443, the latter had Jean V and Pierre de l'Hospital brought before the Parliament of

Paris. It was a fruitless gesture! The king withdrew before the risks of such an enterprise; the date of the month and the day of the citation remained blank, and the document remained a dead letter.

'The king was "perhaps" afraid of being accused of bearding the Inquisition. The affair of Gilles de Raiz did not directly interest Charles VII.'

Historical heresy! The entire history of Brittany is nothing but a perpetual struggle against French centralization. What a pregnant occasion for intervention the undue condemnation of a Marshal of France would have given! As for the Inquisition, Charles VII would have been well-armed to attack its judgment. Did he not have in his own retinue Alain de Coétivy, bishop of Avignon, own brother of Prégent and very influential at the Court of Rome? Nothing was attempted, because there was nothing to do, and Prégent, once aware of that, asked that the henceforth infamous obligation of taking the name and arms of Raiz be

erased from his marriage contract. He died shortly thereafter at the siege of Cherbourg, and Marie de Raiz, widowed at twenty-one, married her cousin André de Laval-Lohéac, Admiral and Marshal of France. She herself died on the first of November, 1457.

Her uncle René took up the reclamation suit. The enormous mass of documents which remains of these procedures, and the *Mémoire des Héritiers* prove his convictions: in their turn he invoked his brother's irresponsibility, his final repentance and his edifying death — never his innocence. He died in 1474, still far from his goal. His only daughter, Jeanne, married François de Chauvigny, and she was to have but one son, who died without heirs in 1502. Hence, sixty-two years after the Marshal's martyrdom, his family had vanished. The Breton historian d'Argentré has said that it was the curse of God.

Neither the king, nor Gilles' family, nor the civil judges, nor the religious judges, nor the innumerable people who assisted during the

controversy, nor the crowd — for not one voice was raised in protest, and we cannot believe that among so many different people there were none but swine — and what is even better . . . nor Gilles himself, believed in his innocence. The crimes for which he was condemned will remain upon his name, just as the blood on Bluebeard's little key, no matter what we do.

## Sources

*Archives:*

The principal sources are to be found in the Archives of Loire-Inférieure. Under section E 189, are kept: 1 — the extracts made by order of the dukes of Brittany, of the majority of sections of the *canonical trial.* Various copies of these extracts exist in the National Library; 2 — *The Inquiry of the Civil Trial.*

Among the Archives of Loire-Inferiéure may also be found a number of contracts of sale drawn with the consent of Gilles de Raiz, and the proxy given to Briqueville (E 174); the appeals filed by the heirs (E 175); the agreements with the Counts of Laval (E 190); the Geoffroy Le Ferron affair (E 197); the Raiz family titles (E 219, 222, 246, 247) and the Archives of the duchy of Raiz (E 486–617).

The National Archives embody the very analytical text of the *Civil Trial,* followed by the account of Gilles' death (U 787); the Parlia-

ment's decree concerning Prelati (X 2ª 26, fol. 173 V°); and the act of pardon granted to Briqueville (JJ 177, fol. 155).

The Archives of la Trémoille contain the *Enquête sur la dilapidation* and various documents concerning Coétivy.

The Archives of Loir-et-Cher include the documents bearing on Gilles de Raiz' marriage: E 160. M. Merlet drew upon these for his *Catherine de Thouars;* Rev. de Bret. et de Vend. 1891.

*Principal Works Consulted:*

In a thesis written for his Doctor of Letters degree, which appeared in 1886, M. l'abbé Bossard published a copy of the sections of the trial which are preserved in Nantes. M. de Maulde, the paleographer, copied these sections from their original text, omitting only the acts of frightful lubricity performed upon little victims of both sexes by Gilles and his accomplices before, during and after death. The scenes were identical, no matter which sex was concerned. Gilles respected the virginity of young girls, although he made them serve his passions. The copyist's pen recoiled before the

terminology and wording of the account, even though the Latin should have given him courage. The author may be reproached for having added credence to the gross fabrications of the Bibliophile Jacob; for having reproduced the horrifying descriptions of la Meffraie, which were due to Michelet's imaginative pen; for having contributed to the spread of the Gilles de Raiz-Bluebeard legend, by the simple title of his work; for having, through his ignorance of the actual youth of Gilles de Raiz, created a physiognomy so sympathetic that the question has since arisen: Is it possible that such a man could have committed such crimes? But there is no doubt that he wrote a book of considerable merit, which has been most attacked by those who have most profited by it.

Abbé Bossard's work has been used more or less by all who have since spoken of Gilles de Raiz: Huysmans, Doctor Cabanès, Salomon Reinach and Hernandez; and in England by E. Vizetelly who, in his work *Bluebeard, an account of Comorre the Cursed and Gilles de Raiz,* forgot that there was a copy in the British Museum (Egerton 947) of the *Civil Trial,*

which was made in the 18th century. We have collated this copy and found it accurate.

René Blanchard published a *Cartulaire des Sires de Raiz,* and in 1872 Marchegay produced *Documents relatifs à Prégent de Coétivy.* On Gilles' youth, M. A. Bourdeaut's scholarly study should be read — *Chantocé, Gilles de Raiz et les ducs de Bretagne,* in the *Bulletin de la Societé d'Hist. et d'Arch. de Bretagne,* 1924. We may profit by this occasion to mention the gratitude owing to M. A. Bourdeaut, who so cordially placed at our disposal his profound knowledge of matters pertaining to Brittany. Let us cite, as worthy of mention, Armand Guéraud's *Notice sur Gilles de Raiz,* 1855. The author speaks of a bull of Eugene IV authorizing Jean de Malestroit, bishop of Nantes, to prosecute Gilles de Raiz; he even reproduces passages! Malestroit had no need to be authorized. However that may be, Mlle. Vieilliard, member of the *École Française de Rome,* writes us that this bull does not exist in the files of the Pontificate of Eugene IV.

Upon the question of his innocence or guilt, consult the following works. For his inno-

cence: Salomon Reinach, *Le Signal,* October 21, 1902; *La Revue des Universités de Belgique,* December 1904; the *Compte-rendu de l'Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres,* January 13, 1905. In Dr. L. Hernandez' *Le Procès inquisitorial de Gilles de Raiz* (Barbe-Bleue), Paris 1921, all of M. Salomon Reinach's arguments may be found, restated. For his guilt: Noël Valois, *Annuaire de la Societé d'Histoire de France,* 1913; Durville, *Express de l'Ouest,* 1919; A. Bourdeaut, *Compte-rendu* of Hernandez' work, in the *Bull. de la Societé d'Hist. et d'Arch. de Bretagne,* 1923.

In dom Lobineau's *Histoire de Bretagne,* II, 1068, and dom Morice's *Histoire de Bretagne,* II, 1336, cf. the *Mémoire des Héritiers,* drawn from E 175. In Montfaucon's *Monuments de la Monarchie française,* the equestrian portrait (?) of Gilles. His genealogy is fully expounded in Bossard. On Gilles and Jeanne des Armoises, see Quicherat's *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc,* VIII. On Prélati, see Guérin's *Doc. rel. au Poitou.*

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